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# THE NEW YORKER





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# THE NEW YORKER

SEPTEMBER 28, 2015

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE** ("THE AVENGER," P. 40), a staff writer and a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, is the author of "The Snakehead: An Epic Tale of the Chinatown Underworld and the American Dream."

**EVAN OSNOS** (COMMENT, P. 21) spent eight years reporting from China. His book "Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China" won the 2014 National Book Award for nonfiction.

**KELLY STOUT** (SHOUTS & MURMURS, P. 35) is a member of the magazine's editorial staff.

**DAVID SEDARIS** ("A MODEST PROPOSAL," P. 36) has written eight books, the most recent of which is "Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls."

**KELEFA SANNEH** ("POP FOR MISFITS," P. 54) is a staff writer.

**THOMAS McGUANE** (FICTION, P. 64) published "Crow Fair," his latest collection of stories, in March.

**JAMES WOOD** (A CRITIC AT LARGE, P. 68) is Professor of the Practice of Literary Criticism at Harvard. His books include "The Nearest Thing to Life," which came out in April.

**NATALIE EILBERT** (POEM, P. 71), the founding editor of *The Atlas Review*, published her first book of poems, "Swan Feast," in April.

**THOMAS MALLON** (BOOKS, P. 76) is a novelist, an essayist, and a critic. His new book, "Finale: A Novel of the Reagan Years," has just been published.

**MARK ULRIKSEN** (COVER) has contributed regularly to the magazine. "Dogs Rule Nonchalantly" is his latest book.

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##### ALSO:

**DAILY COMMENT / CULTURAL COMMENT:** Opinions and analysis by Jeffrey Frank and others. Plus, Laurie Anderson writes about her upcoming artistic collaboration with a former Guantánamo detainee.

**FICTION:** Thomas McGuane reads his short story.

**SLIDE SHOW:** Photographs of the new Broad Museum, in downtown Los Angeles.

**PODCASTS:** On the Political Scene, Hendrik Hertzberg and Evan Osnos join Dorothy Wickenden for a discussion of the recent Republican debate. On Out Loud, Nicola Twilley and Joshua Rothman talk with Amelia Lester and David Haglund about disgust.

**VIDEO:** On the latest episode of "Comma Queen," the copy editor Mary Norris discusses whether it's proper to place a preposition at the end of a sentence.

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# THE MAIL

## TRUMP'S SUPPORTERS

I read the Evan Osnos piece about Donald Trump and his white-nationalist fans with interest ("The Fearful and the Frustrated," August 31st). It is natural to deplore Trump's inflammatory rhetoric as he has emerged as a surprise Republican front-runner in the 2016 Presidential race. But clearly America's long-standing racial orthodoxy, premised on a white majority's overdue acknowledgment of non-white disadvantage, is gradually losing its legitimacy. The demographics of the United States are shifting, and the Trump supporters interviewed by Osnos were responding to this with dread and hostility. They may be angry and afraid, but they don't seem merely ignorant; Trump's candidacy may be an outrage, but the tensions it reveals cannot be wished away. Eventually, even the most moderate politicians will be obliged to address the concerns of a discrete white community whose comfortable social privileges are no longer a given.

*George Case  
Ottawa, Ont.*

Osnos's profile of Trump's supporters was at once fascinating and horrifying. While I have long suspected that Trump's popularity with many voters is due in part to the way he appeals to racists and xenophobes, it was appalling to read the quotes from leaders in America's burgeoning white-supremacist movement, in which they declare their support for his Presidential campaign. At the same time, I was disappointed that *The New Yorker* decided to allow them to use their preferred terminology in identifying themselves—"white nationalist," rather than "white supremacist." White supremacists might like to say that they are white nationalists in order to distance themselves from the historical connotations of white supremacy, imply that their cause is merely patriotic and

concerned with rights, or suggest that white people worldwide belong to one nation, but it seems apparent that what they promote is, in fact, white supremacy. These groups should be called what they are: racist throwbacks to times of terror and violence in America's history.

*Jessica Gibbs  
San Francisco, Calif.*

## FROM ISRAEL TO ILLINOIS

Ruth Margalit got to the heart of the matter in her poignant and complex article on why Sayed Kashua, the Arab Israeli writer and creator of the immensely popular TV series "Arab Labor," chose to leave Israel ("An Exile in the Corn Belt," September 7th). I greatly admired the courage of "Arab Labor" to lampoon both Jewish and Arab stereotypes, on the right and on the left, and was sorry to see it end when it did. But, as Kashua says to Margalit, he "couldn't do humor anymore." I moved to Israel as an idealistic young woman, and my own children were born in Jerusalem, just after the occupation began. I never suffered the pervasive discrimination that Kashua did, but my reasons for leaving were similar to his: I could have avoided the glaring inequality for a while, but I could not lie to my children. Leaving was the hardest decision of my life. Neither Kashua's self-imposed exile nor my own will assuage our deep longing for a more peaceful and equitable land for all of the children of Israel—regardless of their background or religious or cultural affiliation.

*Paula Wagner  
Albany, Calif.*

•  
*Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.*

# "I am at war with the obvious."

William Eggleston



William Eggleston  
Memphis, 1969–1970  
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8 P.M. One World Trade Center (\$50)

### SATURDAY / OCT 3

#### IN CONVERSATION

**Joi Ito**, the director of the M.I.T. Media Lab, talks with **Nicholas Thompson**  
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10 A.M. One World Trade Center (\$45)

#### No Man's Sky

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**Sean Murray**, the architect of the forthcoming video game *No Man's Sky*, talks with **Raffi Khatchadourian** and gives a demonstration of the game.

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##### Reggie Watts talks with Emma Allen

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# GOING ON ABOUT TOWN



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SEPTEMBER 2015    WEDNESDAY 23RD    THURSDAY 24TH    FRIDAY 25TH    SATURDAY 26TH    SUNDAY 27TH    MONDAY 28TH    TUESDAY 29TH

**IN 1950, ERNEST HEMINGWAY** told Lillian Ross, in a Profile for this magazine, "I learned to write by looking at paintings in the Luxembourg Museum in Paris." (Never mind that he published his first short story when he was in high school.) Now a museum is looking at him. On Sept. 25, the Morgan Library opens "Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars," an in-depth assessment of a key period in the writer's development, from 1918, when, at the age of eighteen, he joined the Red Cross and was wounded in Italy, through his years in Paris, Key West, and Havana, to his Second World War reportage. In addition to manuscripts (the first two handwritten pages of "A Farewell to Arms" are on view), correspondence (F. Scott Fitzgerald praises "The Sun Also Rises"), first editions, and photographs, the show includes personal artifacts, like the author's 1923 passport, above.

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# CLASSICAL MUSIC



## OPERA

### Metropolitan Opera

At its best, the vast golden city that Franco Zeffirelli built for Puccini's Chinese fairy tale **"Turandot"** provides a gilt frame for the bold lyrical style of the composer's final and most ambitious opera. This season, a clutch of big-name dramatic sopranos alternates in the punishing title role of the ice princess with a penchant for executing her suitors. First up is Christine Goerke, a powerhouse singer of Wagner and Strauss, who leads a cast including Marcelo Álvarez and Hibla Gerzmava; Paolo Carignani conducts. (Sept. 23 at 7:30 and Sept. 26 at 8.) • The opening scene of Verdi's **"Otello"**—in which the orchestra and chorus fire on all cylinders, the production team simulates a storm, and the tenor makes his star entrance with thirteen voice-shredding measures—is enough to scare off many otherwise enterprising companies. The Met has assembled a team of proven Verdians for Bartlett Sher's new staging: the conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, who has demonstrated a knack for the composer's large-scale scores; the tenor Aleksandr Antonenko, who was all but anointed the next great Otello by the eminent Riccardo Muti; and Željko Lučić, the Met's go-to singer for Verdi's most taxing baritone roles. (Sept. 24 and Sept. 28 at 7:30.) • Early in her career, the superstar soprano Anna Netrebko traded on her considerable glamour and impetuous stage presence; now she continues her recent campaign to be taken seriously as a mature artist with **"Il Trovatore."** Filling out the quartet of challenging principal roles is a team of A-list Verdians: the tenor Yonghoon Lee, the mezzo-soprano Dolora Zajick, and the beloved baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky, who makes a special appearance at the Met amid ongoing treatment for a brain tumor. Marco Armiliato conducts Verdi's high-octane drama in David McVicar's straightforward production. (Sept. 25 and Sept. 29 at 7:30.) • Donizetti never intended for his **"Tudor Queen"** operas to constitute a trilogy, but after Beverly Sills pulled off the feat of performing all three at New York City Opera, in the nineteen-seventies, a new tradition was born. Sondra Radvanovsky, a

soprano of formidable gifts, brings the grouping back to New York for the first time since then, starting with a run of **"Anna Bolena,"** the composer's sympathetic portrait of Henry VIII's second wife. Jamie Barton, Stephen Costello, and Ildar Abdrazakov make up the talented supporting cast; Armiliato. (Sept. 26 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

### LoftOpera

The resourceful company returns to the site of its most recent, acclaimed production, a circus school in Bushwick, for a selection of scenes from **"Aida,"** **"La Traviata,"** and other Verdi operas, featuring a quartet of singers accompanied by piano. The director John de los Santos divides up the playing space into four small stages, surrounded on all sides by the audience, for an immersive opera-going experience. (The Muse, 350 Moffat St., Brooklyn. loftopera.com. Sept. 25-26 at 9; doors open at 8.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### New York Philharmonic

The wave of change that will engulf the Philharmonic in the next several years has already begun: Alan Gilbert has announced that he will be leaving the post of music director in 2017, and the administration of Lincoln Center revealed that Avery Fisher Hall would be renamed David Geffen Hall, in acknowledgement of a hundred-million-dollar gift (earmarked for renovations) from the music-industry mogul. And now the music begins, with two opening-week programs. First comes a gala evening with the pianist Lang Lang, who, under Gilbert's baton, will lend his combustible virtuosity to Grieg's Piano Concerto; Gilbert returns to lead one of the orchestra's favorite warhorses, Beethoven's breathtaking Symphony No. 7 in A Major. (Sept. 24 at 7:30.) • The orchestra's first subscription program also brings together old and new. Gilbert will show off his command of new music by leading **"LA Variations,"** a brilliant work by the composer-conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, who begins his three-season term as the Philharmonic's composer-in-residence this year. After intermission comes

another piece by an orchestral master: Richard Strauss's tone poem **"Ein Heldenleben,"** a hymn to instrumental luxury and artistic ego, which will put the spotlight on the violin solos of Frank Huang, the orchestra's newly appointed concertmaster. (Sept. 25-26 at 8.) (212-875-5656.)

## RECITALS

### Brown and Breen Piano Duo

The Australian duo comes stateside for the first time, bringing the music of fellow countrymen and women in a program at Symphony Space. It includes works by Percy Grainger (his **"Fantasy on Themes from Porgy and Bess"**), Elena Kats-Chernin, Nigel Westlake (**"Oscillations"**), Miriam Hyde, and Ross Edwards, as well as, most tantalizingly, **"Island Songs,"** the final work of Peter Sculthorpe, scored for the unlikely (but no doubt exciting) combination of piano duo and didgeridoo—for which they will be joined by the Aboriginal performer Russell Smith, playing an instrument he commissioned especially for the piece. (Broadway at 95th St. symphonyspace.org. Sept. 25 at 8. No tickets required.)

### Dastan Ensemble with Mahdieh Mohammadkhani

Robert Browning Associates continues its trailblazing four-decade mission supporting non-Western performance by presenting an evening of Persian classical music—an ancient art still vivid in Iran—performed by the renowned Dastan Ensemble (two lutes, a "spike" fiddle, and percussion), who will be joined by an esteemed guest vocalist; they'll perform new works by Hamid Motebassem, based on the poetry of Forough Farrokhzad. (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org. Sept. 26 at 8.)

### Iva Bittová and the Window Quartet

Bittová, the Moravian violinist, vocalist, singer, actor, dancer, and all-consuming force of nature, joins the pianist Tony Fajt and his jazz quartet at Le Poisson Rouge for what will likely be an invigorating evening of musical cross-pollination. (158 Bleecker St. lprnyc.com. Sept. 27 at 9.)

### Trio Solisti: "Brahms: An Intimate Portrait"

The chamber music of Brahms certainly does not lack for performance, but this piano trio, probably the finest American group currently on the field, will bring its signature intensity to the composer's catalogue in concentrated fashion. In the first of three concerts (through December), the ensemble is joined by the violinist Jesse Mills and the violist Hsin-Yun Huang in a survey that includes the Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major, the Piano Quartet No. 3 in C Minor, and the Piano Quintet in F Minor. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Sept. 28 at 7:30.)

### Yarn / Wire: "Currents 4"

With its usual probing éclat, the two-piano, two-percussion ensemble celebrates both its tenth year as a group and the release of a new record by delivering the fourth installment of its genre-defying concert sequence, under the aegis of Issue Project Room. This time, the foursome rolls out world premières by the composers Sam Pluta and David Bird as well as an eclectic work by the British multi-disciplinary artist Mark Fell. Arrive an hour early for a d.j. set and drinks. (Artists Space Books & Talks, 55 Walker St. issueprojectroom.org. Sept. 29 at 8.)

## OUT OF TOWN

### Caramoor: The Knights

The summer season rounds out a little late at Caramoor with what is becoming an annual tradition: an appearance by the Knights, the adventurous and ebullient Brooklyn chamber orchestra. Eric Jacobsen, its longtime conductor, collaborates with one of the musicians' best friends, the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who brings his star quality not only to a formal late-afternoon program but also to a family concert earlier in the day. Both events feature Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4, **"Italian";** Ma plays Dvořák's **"Song to the Moon"** in the first concert, while taking the solo role in Osvaldo Golijov's impassioned work for cello and orchestra, **"Azul,"** in the second. (Katonah, N.Y. caramoor.org. Sept. 27 at 1 and 4.)



# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Museum of Modern Art

**"Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960-1980"**

This rewardingly difficult exhibition of nearly three hundred works is an important salvo in the museum's continued effort to internationalize the story of modern art, disrupting North Atlantic dominance from both the east and the south. An overture of geometric abstraction from the nineteen-fifties, in which Ellsworth Kelly is joined by Brazil's Lygia Clark and Croatia's Julije Knifer, prepends a great rupture: from Prague to Caracas, artists lost faith in institutions, states, and markets, and turned to nontraditional media, from poetry to mail art. Conceptualism, often with a photographic component, became the lingua franca of political opposition: a sequence of portraits shows Romania's Geta Bratescu disappearing under white fabric, while Argentina's David Lamelas is seen turning the galleries of the Venice Biennale into a studio broadcasting news of the Vietnam War. (Fantastic posters by avant-garde Polish graphic designers offer a brief figurative breather.) There's a lot to learn here, and the happy coda is that almost every artwork is from MOMA's collection: proof that the temple of Pollock and his brothers has gone global in both word and deed. Through Jan. 3.

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Gego

Gertrud Goldschmidt—she later compressed her name into a syncopated pseudonym—fled Germany in 1939 for Venezuela. After a stint as an architect, she began making delicate constructions out of aluminum or iron, works so insubstantial they seem less like sculptures than like drawings in space. This exhibition, by turns stern and ravishing, features wall-mounted mesh compositions and later paper weavings, but it orbits around the fragile mobiles the artist called *chorros* ("streams" or "jets" in Spanish), which dangle from the gallery's ceiling. Some of these weird concatenations of thin metal rods extend all the way to the floor, collapsing, like modern civilization itself, into an irresolvable tangle. Through Oct. 24. (Lévy, 909 Madison Ave., at 73rd St. 212-772-2004.)

### PaJaMa

In the late nineteen-forties, the American artists Paul Cadmus, Jared French, and Margaret French made a portmanteau of their first names and collaborated on a series of photographs that owe much to Jared's mannered, oneiric realist paintings. The trio and assorted friends (George Platt Lynes, George Tooker, Donald Windham) posed like sirens or sentinels in the landscapes of Nantucket, Provincetown, and Fire Island, and appeared naked in New York interiors. The small, black-and-white images here may feel overly theatrical and earnest in the era of Instagram, but the best marry the mythic to the erotic with an avant-garde spirit that recalls Jean Cocteau. Through Nov. 7. (Gitterman, 41 E. 57th St. 212-734-0868.)

### Adrián Villar Rojas

The young Argentinian artist's first solo show in New York is a dour, site-specific tour de force. The lights are off and the gallery is hung with gray curtains (even the front desk is hidden from view). Underfoot, chipped clay tiles line the floor, embedded with shells, rope, mica, Coke cans, iPods—even a bicycle tire. Make your way down the long corridor linking the north gallery to the south, which is also tiled and curtained, and you'll encounter a replica of the most famous sculpture in the world: Michelangelo's "David." It rests on its side, genitalia tucked between its legs, and eyes shut, as if sleeping the sleep of the dead. The piece is a testament to Villar Rojas's daring, relegating the apogee of humanist sculpture to the trash heap in his indelible dystopian tableau. Through Oct. 10. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Keltie Ferris

Until recently, the best way to prove you were a serious painter was to paint unseriously: mocking the medium, the way Polke or Kippenberger did, meant that you knew the rules of the game. That moment has passed. This bravura show by a leading figure of the new-nation painting finds Ferris deploying an arsenal of techniques, from spray guns to impressions of her own body, in riotous soft-edged compositions. She eschews Ab-Ex mark-making for nongestural layers of color, airy mauve or honking goldenrod, interrupted at times by flowing circuits broken into patterns suggestive of pixels. This is the work of an artist who isn't afraid to tell painting "I love you." Through Oct. 17. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400.)

### Mark Grotjahn

Grotjahn's seething way with paint, formerly constrained by geometric schemes on canvas, boils over in tall bronze slabs, cast from cardboard constructions. Ragged holes for eyes

and mouths and protruding tubes for Pinocchio-like noses hint at art-brut portraiture. But the main event is the painterly assault in growlingly intense melees of texture and color. Grotjahn scrawls on each piece the date of its execution, à la Picasso. (Is he ambitious? You bet!) In contrast to their elegant blond-wood pedestals, the works look stunningly cruddy, but wait—they plan to roughly romance you. Through Oct. 29. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

### Dana Schutz

Schutz paints like a combination of fire department and fire. In her new show, entitled "Fight in an Elevator," big, blazing canvases—one nearly eighteen feet wide—evinces heroic control of premeditated chaos. Cartoonish figures and fragments of figures (and cartoonish things and fragments of things) swarm and jostle with snatches of planar and amoebic abstraction. Call it Action Cubism, with echoes of Jazz Age illustration and W.P.A. murals. High-fructose color reigns: pink shaded with darker pink, yellow with gold, blue with aqua. Narratives, too, abound: violent (homicidal punks), erotic (bubbling flesh), and winsome (pensive children). If this show leaves out anything about art and life, Schutz seems guaranteed to get to it next time. Through Oct. 24. (Petzel, 456 W. 18th St. 212-680-9467.)

### Elias Sime

This sedulous Ethiopian artist upcycles the digital detritus that lands in the open-air markets of Addis Ababa: motherboards, calculator keys, transistors, diodes. (Like much of the Addis landscape, it's all made in China.) In his New York solo debut, Sime shows the resulting, fevered assemblages, which hang like paintings but bristle from their constituent parts. Sometimes, he cuts the motherboards into curving green rivers; the soldered elements

can suggest aerial views of crowded cities. In his most painstaking works, Sime braids used wires into roiling abstract terrains, transmuting discarded technology into a more enduring power source—art. Through Oct. 17. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

### Josh Smith

The fearlessly insouciant artist hatches yet another easygoing, instantly generic way to paint, on the off chance that anyone wants paintings—nonchalance on that score being his sneaky philosophical riposte to fretting about the medium's fate. On plaster-like white backgrounds, quick lines in grease pencil, usually black or orange, do just enough to sate an aesthete's Jones for the pictorial; at times, they're joined by splashes of watercolor and scuff marks from negligent handling. The effect is no-big-deal vatic—the sublime without tears—and pitch-perfect, in a vengefully pleasant kind of way. Through Oct. 31. (Luhning Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

### Wolfgang Tillmans

More than a hundred photographs—portraits, landscapes, still-lives, reportage, abstractions—sprawl through six rooms in the eccentric salon style that has become the Turner Prize winner's signature. Some of the images are printed as big as shop windows; others are the size of postcards, and displayed on wooden tables. While veering between the monumental and the intimate and back again, the pictures remain grounded in details of the personal and the everyday: a pile of dirty laundry, seedlings sprouting in a bucket, the remains of a watermelon, traffic on Sunset Boulevard. Passionately engaged with the world around him, Tillmans redefines mid-twentieth-century ideas of "concerned" photography for our fraught post-everything age. Through Oct. 24. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

## OF NOTE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART "PICASSO SCULPTURE"

You may come away from this magnificent show of nearly a hundred and fifty objects, which date from 1902 to 1964, convinced that Picasso was more naturally a sculptor than a painter, though all his training and early experience, and by far most of his prodigious energy, went into painting. The definitive artist of the twentieth century was an amateur—nearly a hobbyist—in sculpture, so the medium reveals the core predilections of his genius starkly, without the dizzying subtleties of his painting but true to its essence. Most of his pictures conjure space that is cunningly fitted to the images that inhabit it. When the space becomes real, the dynamic jolts. The herky-jerky intermittence of the artist's involvement with sculpture might seem an obstacle to a reconsideration of his achievement, but it proves to be a boon. Each generation looks at Picasso in its own way. This show gives us a Picasso for an age of cascading uncertainties. The story it tells is messier than the period-by-period, not to mention mistress-by-mistress, narratives of the past. Instead, each piece finds the artist in a moment of decision, adventuring beyond his absolute command of pictorial aesthetics into physical and social space, where everything is in flux and in question. Through Feb. 7.





Danai Gurira's "Eclipsed" tells the story of a rebel officer's captured wives during the Liberian Civil War.

## AMBASSADRESS

*Lupita Nyong'o brings her humane star power to the Public.*

IN 2013, LUPITA NYONG'O made one of the most memorable film débuts in recent years, in Steve McQueen's "12 Years a Slave." As Patsey, a slave at a Louisiana plantation whose life is triply cursed by her master's lust and his wife's sadistic jealousy, Nyong'o showed the raw desperation that Chiwetel Ejiofor's Solomon Northup buried beneath stoic forbearance. You couldn't look away from Patsey's suffering, or forget it. Born in Mexico and raised in Kenya, Nyong'o has said that she bargained with God as a child—she promised to stop stealing sugar cubes—in the hope that she would wake up with lighter skin. But, by the time she won the Academy Award, becoming the first Kenyan actress to do so, she had already become a red-carpet darling; Lancôme quickly snapped her up as their ambassadress. Her star power was unassailable. So was her radiant beauty. How would Hollywood mess this up?

It seemed less than promising when she was cast, soon after, in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," as a C.G.I.-enhanced alien pirate. At the Yale School of Drama, from which she graduated, in 2012, she had done Shakespeare and Chekhov. Could no one find her a character from within this galaxy? Perhaps that has something to do with why Nyong'o is coming to the Public Theatre, in her first New York stage role. "Eclipsed" (starting previews Sept. 29), which tells the story of a group of women held captive during the Liberian Civil War, in 2003, is by the Zimbabwean-American playwright Danai Gurira, best known for her role on "The Walking Dead" and for her and Nikkole Salter's advocacy-inflected play, "In the Continuum," about the global impact of H.I.V. Nyong'o has also advocated for international causes, from elephant conservation to ending prejudice against albinos. Let's hope that this role, and plenty more to come, will give her the chance not just to inspire but to stretch her sizable talents. She has said she's interested in doing comedy. Any takers?

—Michael Schulman



## THE THEATRE

### OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

#### Antigone

At the Next Wave Festival, Juliette Binoche stars in Ivo van Hove's production of the Sophocles tragedy, in a new translation by Anne Carson. Previews begin Sept. 24. Opens Sept. 27. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

#### Barbecue

Kent Gash directs a new play by Robert O'Hara ("Bootycandy"), in which a group of siblings gather in a park to confront their sister about her drug abuse. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

#### Clever Little Lies

Marlo Thomas stars in Joe DiPietro's comedy, directed by David Saint, as a woman trying to figure out what went wrong during a tennis match between her husband and her son. In previews. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

#### Cloud Nine

James Macdonald directs Caryl Churchill's political drama from 1979, set in colonial Africa during the Victorian era and in contemporary London. In previews. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

#### Fondly, Collette Richland

Elevator Repair Service stages a play by Sibyl Kempson, about a couple who travel to a mysterious hotel through a tiny door in their living room. In previews. Opens Sept. 28. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

#### Fool for Love

In Sam Shepard's play, directed by Daniel Aukin for Manhattan Theatre Club, Nina Arianda and Sam Rockwell play brawling ex-lovers at a motel in the Mojave Desert. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

#### MotherStruck

Cynthia Nixon directs a solo play by the poet-performer Staceyann Chin, about her decision to have a child as a lesbian and an activist. Previews begin Sept. 24. (Lynn Redgrave Theatre, 45 Bleeker St. 866-811-4111.)

#### Old Times

Clive Owen makes his Broadway début in this enigmatic love triangle by Harold Pinter, directed by Douglas Hodge for the Roundabout. With Eve Best and Kelly Reilly, featuring original music by Thom Yorke. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

#### Perfect Arrangement

In Topher Payne's comedy, directed by Michael Barakiva for Primary Stages, two couples in



nineteen-fifties America recast their lives like a sitcom amid the Lavender Scare. Previews begin Sept. 29. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

### The Quare Land

Irish Rep presents John McManus's play, directed by Ciarán O'Reilly, in which an old Irish farmer is visited by a real-estate developer who wants to convert his land into a golf course. With Rufus Collins and Peter Maloney. In previews. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-727-2737.)

### Reread Another

Target Margin stages Gertrude Stein's rarely performed play, from 1921, directed by David Herskovits. Previews begin Sept. 24. Opens Sept. 28. (The Brick, 579 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

### Ripcord

Marylouise Burke, Holland Taylor, Rachel Dratch, and Glenn Fitzgerald star in a new comedy by David Lindsay-Abaire, directed by David Hyde Pierce for Manhattan Theatre Club, about two women in assisted living who are forced to share a room. Previews begin Sept. 29. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

### Sommerfugl

Bixby Elliot's play was inspired by the life of Lili Elbe, who, in the nineteen-thirties, became the first known recipient of gender-reassignment surgery. Stephen Brackett directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 24. (4th Street Theatre, at 83 E. 4th St. 866-811-4111.)

### Spring Awakening

Deaf West Theatre revives the 2006 indie-rock musical, by Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater, based on the Frank Wedekind drama of teen-age sexual discovery. Directed by Michael Arden and performed in sign language and spoken English. In previews. Opens Sept. 27. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

### Would You Still Love Me If . . .

Kathleen Turner directs John S. Anatas's play, in which Turner and Roya Shanks play two women expecting a child whose lives are upturned by issues of gender identity. Previews begin Sept. 26. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

### NOW PLAYING

#### The Christians

Lucas Hnath is that rare thing—a playwright with a vision—but the director Les Waters doesn't do much to bring that out. This ninety-minute, intermissionless piece is about the business of faith, and the private lives of those who mean to do God's work but can't extend that faith—their professed Christianity—to themselves, or to their loved ones. Backed by a cheery and brightly dressed choir, a church

pastor, Paul (Andrew Garman, an exciting presence), watches, crestfallen and increasingly sweaty, as his flock abandons him and the idea that his bad deeds can be made right. Doing especially fine work in this weirdly flat production are Larry Powell, who plays the associate pastor, and Emily Donahoe, as Jenny, a congregant whose beautiful, light speaking voice does little to disguise her confusion over the pain that Paul has wrought, and the loneliness it has caused his congregation. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

### Genet Porno

"She cherishes vulgarity," Jean Genet wrote of Divine, the cross-dressing prostitute at the center of his 1943 novel, "Our Lady of the Flowers." So, it seems, does Yvan Greenberg, the creator of this moody mash-up of "Our Lady," which Genet wrote in prison as a dreamlike autoerotic reverie, and the video blog of a modern gay porn star. Greenberg begins the show by welcoming the audience naked, then morphs into Damon Dogg, a real-life Internet stud. He's soon joined by Divine (Oleg Dubson) and Darling Daintyfoot (Joe Joseph), her pimp lover, in scenes that drift from melancholy sex to underworld excursions and back again. Many are performed with strap-on dildos, with the actors' throbbing and thrusting "choreographed" into modern-dance abstraction. It's all a little tedious, but perhaps the best tribute to Genet is to make him truly smutty. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 26.)

### Hamlet in Bed

The playwright Michael Laurence specializes in responses to great works. His last piece was the semi-autobiographical, Beckett-fixed monologue "Krapp, 39." Now he samples the Danish tragedy with this meta-theatrical, psychosexual two-hander. Michael (Laurence), an Off Broadway actor, is a middle-aged orphan who suffered an abusive adoptive father and overly intimate adoptive mother. He favors an all-black wardrobe. In other words, he was born to play Hamlet. (No pain, no Dane.) When Michael discovers his actual birth mother, a former actress and current cat lady named Anna May (Annette O'Toole), he casts her as Gertrude in a production he quickly devises. He hopes that rehearsals will force her to acknowledge her maternity—a downtown "Mousetrap." While Laurence has created a resonant role for himself and a more erratic one for O'Toole, his implausible script abounds in rhymed doggerel and ponderous Hamlet parallels. The play really isn't the thing. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 866-811-4111.)

### How to Live on Earth

In this Colt Coeur production, four young civilians with big dreams (Molly

Carden, Charles Socarides, Genesis Oliver, and Amelia Workman) are in the running for a mission to Mars from which they'll never return, and, though they're each more excited than the other, their friends and family are not. Lofty ideas about science and saving the human race aside, it's clear that some of the contenders would rather be anywhere but here, with their boring jobs and needy loved ones. MJ Kaufman's darkly funny play, directed by Adrienne Campbell-Holt, illuminates the absurd lengths humans will go to to avoid their daily lives, but also captures well the profound dependency of dreamers who are forever looking up. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

### Iphigenia in Aulis

In this "transadaptation," the playwright Anne Washburn hasn't made Euripides colloquial but, rather, embraced the tragedy's ancient eccentricities. At issue: the Trojan War is afoot, and Agamemnon (Rob Campbell) has received a divine edict to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia (Kristen Sieh), in exchange for wind. "For *wind*?" Clytemnestra (Amber Gray) asks incredulously. Rachel Chavkin's production deals best with humor and spectacle: a Greek chorus in flowery headdresses sings and spasms to music by the indie duo the Bengsons, like a hipster Polynesian folk group. But the story's central horror is thrown off by Campbell's hammy machismo—double-cast as Agamemnon and Achilles, he seems to be imitating Walken and De Niro—a tonal mismatch with Gray's poised Clytemnestra. In the end, it's Sieh's off-kilter Iphigenia who steals the show, embracing her doom with the fanaticism of a goth teen-ager. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. Through Sept. 27.)

### Isolde

In Richard Maxwell's riveting drama, staged last year at Abrons Arts Center and remounted by Theatre for a New Audience, a famous actress, Isolde (Tory Vazquez), is losing her memory, so, to cheer her up, her husband (Jim Fletcher), who's a contractor, gives her carte blanche to build her dream house. She hires a vain and self-involved "artist-architect" (Gary Wilmes) to design it, but once they start having sex he's unable to put his vision for her house on paper. Under Maxwell's inspired direction, the actors are almost entirely affectless—looking out into the audience and saying their lines stiffly, as if they were reading them—as they enact a drama that is full of deep emotion. Maxwell's writing is beautiful, and sometimes very funny, and the acting style seems wonderfully true: as a species, we may well be that disembodied. (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. Through Sept. 27.)

### ALSO NOTABLE

#### THE ABSOLUTE BRIGHTNESS OF LEONARD PELKEY

Westside

#### AMAZING GRACE

Nederlander

#### AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

Palace

#### CHAMBRE

New Museum

#### THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

Ethel Barrymore

#### DESIRE

59E59

#### DROP DEAD PERFECT

Theatre at St. Clement's

#### ECLIPSED

Public

#### EMPIRE TRAVEL AGENCY

Lower Manhattan.

Through Sept. 27.

#### FINDING NEVERLAND

Lunt-Fontanne

#### THE FLICK

Barrow Street Theatre

#### FULFILLMENT

Flea

#### FUN HOME

Circle in the Square

#### A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER

Walter Kerr

#### HAMILTON

Richard Rodgers

#### HAND TO GOD

Booth

#### JUDY

New Ohio.

Through Sept. 26.

#### THE KING AND I

Vivian Beaumont

#### LAUGH IT UP, STARE IT DOWN

Cherry Lane

#### THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE

Lucille Lortel

#### LOVE & MONEY

Pershing Square Signature

Center

#### MERCURY FUR

Pershing Square Signature

Center. Through Sept. 27.

#### A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Pearl

#### THE NEW MORALITY

Mint

#### OUR LAST GAME

Nord Anglia International

School

#### SLEEP NO MORE

McKittrick Hotel

#### SOMETHING ROTTEN!

St. James

#### UGLY LIES THE BONE

Roundabout Underground





# NIGHT LIFE

## ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.*

### Godspeed You! Black Emperor

In March, this nine-member Montreal-based group released "Asunder, Sweet and Other Distress," an album as epic and passionate as their landmark 1997 debut, "F#A#∞." The record's four songs, especially the ten-and-a-half-minute opener, "Peasantry or 'Light! Inside of Light!,'" and the fourteen-minute closer, "Piss Crowns Are Trebled," traverse familiar, expansive sonic terrain. In the few interviews they've given since re-forming in 2010 (after a seven-year hiatus), the group's members have emphasized their commitment to collectivist principles and an anarchist-tinged view of contemporary politics, which, like their wordless music, seems to alternate between hope and despair. (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600, Sept. 29. Warsaw, 261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn. 718-387-0505, Oct. 1.)

### The Jesus and Mary Chain

In the mid-eighties, these Scottish alt-rockers lacquered the tough girl-group sounds pioneered by Phil Spector with the demented feedback of the Velvet Underground and Iggy Pop, and the combination proved effective; their 1985 magnum opus, "Psychocandy," became a singular

entry in the history of pop music, catalyzing the U.K. shoegaze phenomenon. This November marks the album's thirtieth birthday, and to celebrate the band is on a quick tour of the East Coast, performing the record in its entirety. They play two nights in New York this week; for the full effect, wear black leather and sunglasses. (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Sept. 24-25.)

### Low

Since this trio from Duluth, Minnesota, led by the guitarist and songwriter Alan Sparhawk and his wife, Mimi Parker, was formed, in 1993, the group's music has been marked by slow tempos and the interplay between Sparhawk's yearning vocals and Parker's soaring harmonies, which give the songs a vaguely religious quality. (Both Sparhawk and Parker are practicing Mormons.) In a bit of a departure, the group's compelling new record, "Ones and Sixes," is filled with fragmented grooves and electronica flourishes, but the highlight remains the desolate, beautiful sound of Sparhawk and Parker singing together. (Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. Sept. 24.)

### Riis Park Beach Bazaar

In the past few years, the beach at Jacob Riis Park, in the Rockaways, has earned a reputation as "the

Hamptons of Bushwick," and this hip new venue, in a former Art Deco-style bathhouse, has quickly become a hub. Since May, on Saturdays and Sundays, it has hosted the palest beach parties in history, soundtrack by trendy local rockers. This is the final bash of the season, featuring a Saturday performance by the Syracuse noise-rockers **Perfect Pussy** and a Sunday closer by the **So So Glos**, a brash punk-rock group that's become a staple of the Brooklyn D.I.Y. scene. Both shows start at 1 P.M. (144-3 Rockaway Beach Blvd., Queens. Sept. 26-27.)

### Tears for Fears

Alternating between New Wave karaoke fodder ("Everybody Wants to Rule the World," "Shout") and goth-tinged moe-rock ("Mad World"), this British duo has aged better than much of the so-called Second British Invasion of the mid-eighties. The group is led by childhood friends Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith, who dug into youthful trauma for inspiration. (The band is named after a form of primal therapy refined by the psychologist Arthur Janov.) They're currently halfway through a short tour that skips New York City; a Port Chester performance, on Sept. 28, is your best bet for catching them in the near future. (Capitol Theatre, 149 Westchester Ave., Port Chester, N.Y. 914-937-4126.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Chick Corea and Béla Fleck

Unlikely musical bedfellows, the jazz pianist Corea and the banjo phenomenon Fleck unite by way of a mutual thirst for genre-hopping exploration, as heard on their 2007 album, "The Enchantment." A new live recording, "Two," finds the

shamelessly virtuosic duo again reaching common ground on diverse material that includes a bluegrass take on "Bugle Call Rag," à la Flatt and Scruggs. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. Sept. 27.)

### Festival of New Trumpet Music

Now in its twelfth year, this festival keeps its focus tight, but daring instrumentalists and composers often enliven the event. The first week features the **Thomas Bergeron Ensemble** (with the singer **Becca Stevens**) adapting Messiaen, and an evening curated by **Marquis Hill**—an imposing Chicago horn man now based in New York—with **Ingrid Jensen** and **Josh Evans**. (Various venues. fontmusic.org. Sept. 24-29.)

### José James

This year marks the centennial of Billie Holiday, whose ignominious death in 1959, at the age of forty-four, deprived the world of an incomparable artist. Celebrating the legendary singer, as he did on his recent album "Yesterday I Had the Blues: The Music of Billie Holiday," is the vocalist James, whose deliberate and understated manner confirms that Holiday is again speaking to a new generation of jazz singers. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Sept. 22-27.)

### Kurt Rosenwinkel Trio

A twenty-first-century jazz guitar hero, Rosenwinkel is as comfortable performing solo as he is with expanded ensembles, but a cozy and compact trio may be the perfect setting to appreciate his harmonically imaginative mastery. His expert support team includes the bassist **Eric Revis** and the drummer **Nasheet Waits**. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Sept. 22-27.)



# DANCE

### New York City Ballet

The company kicks off its fall season with that most quintessential of ballets, "Swan Lake." With its modernist designs, streamlined structure, and rather stark ending, Peter Martins's production can feel a tad cold. But Tchaikovsky's rapturous music is still there, as is the extraordinary choreography for Odette—queen of the swans—and her conniving rival, Odile. Among the host of ballerinas handling the dual role is the fierce, impulsive Sara Mearns. • Sept. 22-24 and Sept. 29 at 7:30, Sept. 25 at 8,

Sept. 26 at 2 and 8, and Sept. 27 at 3: "Swan Lake." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through Oct. 18.)

### Camille A. Brown & Dancers

Brown's social-issue pieces can feel too much like the book reports of a diligent student, but "BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play" requires less research. The movement vocabulary, drawing from sidewalk games like double Dutch, engages Brown's rhythmic gifts and intensity. As she and her all-female cast interact with live music by the pianist Scott Patterson and the electric bassist Tracy Wormworth, they illustrate the dynamics of sisterhood and the dangers of sexuality, fast stepping in sneakers. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 22-27.)

### K. Kvarnström & Co.

In "TAPE," the Finnish-born choreographer Kenneth Kvarnström, now

based in Stockholm, plays with ideas of the Baroque. The musician Jonas Nordberg performs Bach, Couperin, and Poulenc on lute, guitar, and theorbo, as dancers entangle with one another, sometimes with duct tape, or seem to disassemble their bodies at the joints. They also speak about Baroque music and baking, periodically flashing ironic hashtags on signs. (BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Sept. 23-26.)

### Yasuko Yokoshi

Yokoshi, a deeply intelligent choreographer who has spent years skillfully superimposing the techniques of Western post-modernism and traditional Japanese theatre and dance, presents her latest work, "ZERO ONE," at Danspace Project. The two performers, Manami and Sawami Fukuoka, are identical twins; one has immersed herself in Western contemporary dance,

the other in the postwar Japanese dance-theatre movement known as Butoh. Yokoshi has added another layer: a film showing the work of the Japanese performance artists Hangman Takuzo and Namiko Kawamura. (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Sept. 24-26.)

### Jack Ferver and Marc Swanson

Riffing off Jean Genet's "The Maids" and the tabloid murder that inspired it, "Chambre" (having its New York premiere as part of the "Crossing the Line" festival) mixes class resentment with gender politics. Amid Swanson's set of wardrobes and mirrors, which doubles as an installation between performances, Ferver and his fellow-performers critique diva behavior (including Lady Gaga's) by sending it up and indulging in it. (New Museum, 235 Bowery, at Prince St. 877-500-1932. Sept. 24-27. Through Oct. 4.)





Crista Alfiate plays Scheherazade and Américo Silva plays the Grand Vizier in Miguel Gomes's "Arabian Nights."

## PRESENT TENSE

*The New York Film Festival displays history on the wing.*

**VETERANS OF THE** New York Film Festival (Sept. 25-Oct. 11) return with bold and surprising variations on their longstanding political themes. The Portuguese director Miguel Gomes takes economic crisis as the springboard for "Arabian Nights" (Sept. 30-Oct. 2). Split into three films, it's an uproarious and scathing, compassionate and urgent outburst that runs more than six hours.

Gomes riffs freely on the legend of Scheherazade, depicting himself as a filmmaker telling stories in order to save his own life. He hired a team of journalists to crisscross Portugal, and he developed the film's present-day stories on the basis of its findings. The action ranges from the bravery of workers protesting the closing of a shipyard to the absurdity of a rooster put on trial for crowing. Meanwhile, Scheherazade herself (played by Crista Alfiate) is a crucial presence, seen riding on a Ferris wheel with her father and theorizing about narrative. In the wry context of tweaked myths, Gomes mines human-interest stories for their authentic human interest, finding high drama in intimate conflicts sparked by unemployment or cuts in social services, by twists of temperament or the force of desire.

Elaborate fantasies and raucous antics converge with Gomes's view of an ostensible democracy whose citizens have lost control. An obscene burlesque of international bureaucrats dictating Portugal's austerity program is matched with a parody of local elections and a wild mockery of the judicial system. Animals play a big part in Gomes's humanistic vision; a dog in a housing project bears witness to the calamities of a neighborhood in stifled despair. The movie culminates in a warmly majestic look at a community of bird-catchers whose passionately engaged self-regulation yields an autonomous, populist utopia.

Nanni Moretti, one of the great first-person filmmakers, gives himself a supporting role in "Mia Madre" (Sept. 27-28). He plays Giovanni, an engineer whose mother (Giulia Lazzarini), a beloved professor of Latin, is stricken with a fatal illness. The protagonist is Margherita (Margherita Buy), Giovanni's sister, a movie director whose effort to shoot a drama about factory workers facing layoffs is beset by distractions, including her mother's illness and the behavior of her star, an American actor (John Turturro) who veers from overbearing warmth to arrogant aggression. Turturro's comic exuberance is matched by Moretti's sardonic view of life on a movie set; the practical obstacles to artistic creation are rivalled by mental crises, which Moretti depicts in a

brilliant cinema-centric dream sequence.

Chantal Akerman's colossal 1975 feature, "Jeanne Dielman," wasn't in the New York Film Festival; her new film, "No Home Movie" (Oct. 7-8), is actually a home movie that evokes the raw material of that earlier work. Here, Akerman films her elderly mother in the family's apartment in Brussels, composing shots through doorways and at incisive angles that serve as insulation for the heat of family sentiment. Eliciting her mother's tales of escape from Poland and deportation to Auschwitz, of her grandparents' religious devotion and her father's flight to secularism, Akerman enfoldes vast currents of history in a prodigal daughter's tale of concern for an ailing parent.

—Richard Brody



## OPENING

### ASHBY

In this comedy, Mickey Rourke plays a dying hitman who befriends a teen-age neighbor (Nat Wolff). Directed by Tony McNamara; co-starring Emma Roberts. Opening Sept. 25. (In limited release.)

### THE INTERN

A comedy, written and directed by Nancy Meyers, starring Robert De Niro as a retiree who returns to work for an Internet startup. Co-starring Anne Hathaway. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)

### THE KEEPING ROOM

In this historical thriller, set during the Civil War, three women—a former slave (Muna Otaru) and two Southern whites (Brit Marling and Hailee Steinfeld)—defend themselves against two marauding Union soldiers. Directed by Daniel Barber. Opening Sept. 25. (In limited release.)

### MISSISSIPPI GRIND

A drama, about a compulsive gambler (Ben Mendelsohn) who takes a friend (Ryan Reynolds) on a road trip to casinos throughout the South. Directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck; co-starring Yvonne Landry. Opening Sept. 25. (In limited release.)

### MISUNDERSTOOD

Asia Argento directed this drama, about a nine-year-old girl (Giulia Salerno) who is abandoned by her parents (Charlotte Gainsbourg and Gabriel Byrne). Opening Sept. 25. (In limited release.)

### 99 HOMES

In this drama, a man who is evicted from his home takes a job with the broker who evicted him. Directed by Ramin Bahrani; starring Andrew Garfield, Michael Shannon, and Laura Dern. Opening Sept. 25. (In limited release.)



### MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Kazuo Hara's "The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On," from 1987, in our digital edition and online.

## NOW PLAYING

### The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution

This documentary, directed by Stanley Nelson, will be a useful primer for anyone unschooled in the story of the Black Panthers, although their look, their impact, and their *raison d'être* remain lodged with surprising tenacity in the public mind. We hear of the birth of the movement in Oakland, California, and of the speed with which its militant message spread to the North, in contrast with the more equable, church-grounded toil for civil rights in the Southern states. We are presented with the leading players, including Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver, and with the disputes that would, later on, so bitterly divide them. (At the F.B.I., as the film shows, J. Edgar Hoover, who viewed the Panthers as a menace to society, noted this dissent with satisfaction and let them tear each other apart.) The movie is hardly the most objective of accounts, but fieriness is part of its appeal, stoked by the songs on the soundtrack and sustained by a belief that the grievances aired at the time remain unresolved. —*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/7/15.) (In limited release.)

### Coming Home

The director Zhang Yimou's calculatedly poignant drama depicts a Chinese family torn apart by the Anti-Rightist Campaign of the late fifties, driven deeper into despair by the Cultural Revolution, and uneasily reassembled in the late-seventies thaw. Lu (Chen Daoming), a former professor and political prisoner, escapes and makes his way back to the family home that he shared with his wife, Feng (Gong Li), a teacher, and their daughter, Dandan (Zhang Huiwen), whom he hasn't seen since she was three. But Dandan, a ballet dancer imbued with Communist Party doctrine, rejects him, leading to his recapture. When he's ultimately freed, he returns to Feng but finds her afflicted with dementia. Zhang's smooth direction milks the melodrama for intimate emotion, conjuring the bad old days with varnished surfaces that give unspeakable suffering a halcyon glow. The drama of Feng's failing memory involves a bitter twist of corruption and hypocrisy, but the Party's ultimate benevolence remains unquestioned. Zhang's rueful sentiment bears a whiff of the official. In Mandarin. —*Richard Brody* (In limited release.)

### Grandma

Lily Tomlin shines as the cantankerous, combative, brutally frank poet Elle Reid, now fallen into literary silence after the death of her partner of thirty-eight years. Elle breaks up with a new, much younger girlfriend named Olivia (Judy Greer), but her uncreative solitude is disturbed by the arrival of her teen-age granddaughter, Sage (Julia Garner), who is pregnant

and has an appointment for an abortion that very day, but no money to pay for it. Neither does Elle, who, as a result, packs Sage into her old car and goes on a local odyssey through her circle of acquaintances, past and present, in quest of the funds. The tightly constructed small-scale comic drama, written and directed by Paul Weitz, puts Elle face to face with a lifetime of bittersweet memories, involving the transgender tattoo artist Deathy (Laverne Cox) and Karl (Sam Elliott), the man whom Elle left when she came out as a lesbian. But Weitz leaches the tough situations of emotional difficulty; the sentimental drama is a superhero movie for liberals. Elle's faux crustiness gleams with her heart of gold, and the movie's heroes and villains line up as obviously as in a blockbuster. —*R.B.* (In limited release.)

### Marnie

Tippi Hedren's cool grace in "The Birds" hardly prepares a viewer for her porcelain *froidœur* as a sexually traumatized kleptomaniac in Alfred Hitchcock's psychologically resonant, visually transcendent film, from 1964. Sean Connery co-stars as a businessman who hires Marnie as his secretary, lusts mightily after her, and, catching her with a hand in his till, takes it upon himself to win her heart—and, above all, her body—by healing her mind. Borrowing liberally from himself (notably, several tropes from "Spellbound," "Vertigo," and "Psycho"), Hitchcock gives his obsessions luridly free rein—intentionally and not. He was, in fact, obsessed with Hedren, whose rejections he repaid with harsh treatment, and it shows in his images: few films have looked as longingly, as relentlessly, and as cruelly at a woman; few onscreen gazes at an actress have so perfectly crystallized an integral and unique style of performance; and few performances have so precisely defined a director's world view, even unto the vanishing point. He could, and did, go no further. —*R.B.* (Film Forum; Sept. 28.)

### Pawn Sacrifice

A flawed yet entertaining docudrama about an irresistible subject: the 1972 world-championship chess match between Bobby Fischer (played by Tobey Maguire) and Boris Spassky (Liev Schreiber). The movie starts with a dramatic moment at the tournament site in Reykjavik—Fischer's non-appearance for the second game. The ensuing flashbacks show Fischer's childhood in Brooklyn, where he was raised by a single mother (Robin Weigert) who was an active Communist and who aroused McCarthyite snooping, and his subsequent rise through a chess establishment that treated him with indifference and even hostility. Obsessed with wresting the championship from Soviet players, Fischer fears K.G.B. plots; ultimately, psychotic delusions

take hold of his personality, but not before he wins the championship. The lawyer Paul Marshall (Michael Stuhlbarg) works behind the scenes to get covert government aid for Fischer; the chess-master-turned-priest William Lombardy (Peter Sarsgaard) helps Fischer prepare for the match while admiring his artistry with a connoisseur's eye. The drama, directed by Edward Zwick, takes liberties with the story and shears off some fascinating details; but despite the rigid yet slapdash filmmaking, the movie conveys the fascination and mystery of a tormented genius at work. —*R.B.* (In wide release.)

### The River's Edge

This lurid quasi-Western, from 1957, starts as a film-noir twist on "Green Acres." Meg Cameron (Debra Paget), a stylish city woman, is miserable on a Southwestern desert ranch with her gruff but worshipful husband, Ben (Anthony Quinn). Then, a pink convertible bearing her ex-lover and former partner in crime, Nardo Denning (Ray Milland), rolls up. Meg, out of jail on probation, can't get him out of her system; Nardo, with a briefcase full of cash, wants to escape with her to Mexico, and forces Ben at gunpoint to get them there. The director, Allan Dwan, fills the sunbaked landscape with an acrid haze of moods and a suffocating tangle of emotions, which he conjures with sharp, stark images of stifled frenzy. One sequence in particular, of a border-patrol inspection gone bad, is an anthology piece of efficient, expressive action filmmaking; in a few slashing brushstrokes, Dwan captures the ecstatic horror of life on the edge. —*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Sept. 23 and Sept. 27.)

### Sicario

A young F.B.I. agent, Kate Macer (Emily Blunt), based at the frontier between America and Mexico, joins a new outfit that's devoted to nailing the men who run the drug cartels. The team, which includes the cheerful Matt (Josh Brolin, in flip-flops) and the more mournful Alejandro (Benicio Del Toro), appears to have free rein—much to the dismay of Kate, who cleaves to the rule of law. Many blundering and noisy thrillers have been forged from such a setup, but the director here is Denis Villeneuve, and so the mood, even during exchanges of gunfire, is never less than ominous and fraught. Whether it suits Blunt, with her natural play of wit, is open to question, whereas Del Toro, allowing us only glimpses of his character's compulsions, thrives amid the gloom. The set pieces are carefully parcelled out: a shootout in a traffic jam, a dark descent into a border tunnel, and the discovery, inside an ordinary house, of corpses filling the walls. Anybody hoping for good news from the front line of the drug wars should look elsewhere. The director



of photography is Roger Deakins: a recommendation in itself.—*A.L.* (9/21/15) (In wide release.)

### Sleeping with Other People

This romantic comedy delivers bland and familiar substance in a peculiar package. In college, the near-strangers Lainey (Alison Brie) and Jake (Jason Sudeikis) lose their virginity to each other and then fall quickly out of touch. Twelve years later, they live in New York; she's a kindergarten teacher, he's a tech-startup guy, and they reconnect by chance while leaving a group meeting for sex addicts. Lainey and Jake become close friends, supporting each other's efforts to avoid sex even while it's obvious to viewers that they're falling in love. What Lainey and Jake think is never made clear; the director and writer, Leslye Headland ("Bachelorette"), doesn't get close enough to find out. The premise prompts much talk about sex, most of which is written in screenwriter-ese, awaiting punctuation by a laugh track. Yet there's pathos in Lainey's disastrous long-term affair with a gynecologist (Adam Scott), and a scene in which Jake teaches Lainey to masturbate suggests a psychodramatic intensity that Headland doesn't reach elsewhere.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

### There's No Tomorrow

Scandal and secrecy, crime and coercion haunt this operatic melodrama of romantic desperation, from 1939. It stars the breathlessly histrionic Edwige Fenech as Evelyn, an actor of sorts—a topless dancer who brings an air of class to a sordid Paris night club, where she and her colleagues are expected to go home with the high rollers. Then she runs into Georges (George Rigaud), her long-lost love, a prominent doctor visiting from Canada; unwilling to disclose her way of life, she puts on a big show, renting a posh apartment in a stuffy neighborhood with funds she borrows from a gangster who expects her to extort money from Georges and share it with him. The director, Max Ophüls, strips the demimonde of its louche allure and displays its predatory carnal cruelty. Eschewing his usual tracking shots, he presses in on Evelyn with screen-filling closeups of a shrieking intensity; her fragile self-image and the manners of respectable society shatter with one fateful move. In French.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Sept. 28.)

### Time Out of Mind

Despite Richard Gere's fiercely committed performance as George Hammond, a formerly prosperous and now homeless man scraping by

in New York's streets and shelters, this drama is less than the sum of its parts. The writer and director, Oren Moverman, builds the film around George's daily agonies—the lack of a decent place to sleep, the violence and mockery of gawkers, bureaucratic tangles, trouble with hygiene, the need for food—and his personal demons, including alcohol, grief, and broken family ties. But Moverman's strained effort to squeeze George's activities into a series of plot lines is matched by an arch and portentous visual style. Filming through doors and windows with off-balance framings and eerie reflections, the director suggests a world and a life out of whack. Subsisting in public spaces, George endures both a lack of privacy and an oppressive solitude, yet glimmers of friendship between George and a former jazz musician, Dixon Turner (Ben Vereen), veer uneasily between "Odd Couple" comedy and overwrought melodrama. The filmmaker's good intentions and great ambitions go unrealized. With Jena Malone, as George's daughter.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

### The Visit

For all its intelligence and craft, M. Night Shyamalan's foray into the genre of found-footage horror

has the feeling of homework done well. Its fifteen-year-old protagonist, Becca (Olivia DeJonge), a precocious documentary filmmaker, and her thirteen-year-old brother, Tyler (Ed Oxenbould), a nerdy rapper, leave their home in Philadelphia and head to rural Pennsylvania to spend a week with their maternal grandparents, whom they've never met. The teens' mother, played by Kathryn Hahn, eloped at nineteen and never saw her parents again; the movie's found footage is Becca's documentary of the trip, which is meant to reunite the family. However, when the teens meet Nana (Deanna Dunagan) and Pop Pop (Peter McRobbie), they soon discover that things are amiss. The strange and fearsome doings owe nothing to the supernatural; rather, Pop Pop's furtive visits to a lonely shed, Nana's nocturnal wanderings, and the surprising outcome of a game of hide-and-seek lead to the children's mounting terror. Meanwhile, Becca, armed with a batch of rote theories, continues to make her film. It delivers a few jolts and a few tense laughs, but Shyamalan stays on the surface and at a distance; his script is airtight and, despite deft camera work by Maryse Alberti, he displays no documentary curiosity of his own.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

## ABOVE & BEYOND

### The Hills on Governors Island

New plans for the centerpiece of the park on Governors Island feature four man-made hills assembled atop the rubble of buildings left over from the island's days as a Coast Guard base. Construction won't be completed until 2017, but the Hills will be open for a preview on Sept. 26-27. This is the first time the site has been accessible to the public and the first opportunity to see the Hills at their full height of seventy feet—offering an entirely new view of the Statue of Liberty and Lower Manhattan. (govisland.com.)

### World Maker Faire

The maker movement embraces a wide swath of innovators, inventors, and tinkerers who, in the face of modern convenience, have continued the tradition of hands-on crafting while often incorporating new technology. Those creators come out of their basements and garage workshops for this festival, one of the world's largest celebrations of the D.I.Y. ethos. Among a huge range of displays and presentations, visitors can watch races between souped-up Power Wheels, witness the Rube Goldberg machinations

of a sixty-five-hundred-square-foot Mousetrap board game, or learn about how 3-D printing is bringing prosthetics to underserved populations. (New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., Queens. makerfaire.com. Sept. 26-27.)

### AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The art for sale at Christie's American auction this week (Sept. 22) is tinged with nostalgia for a magic time that never was. From Childe Hassam, there are two pastel-colored Long Island scenes, one depicting a bucolic garden in East Hampton and the other an even more bucolic beach scene, bursting with cool greens and blues. There are impressions of winter, too, like Grandma Moses's "Skating on the Mill Pond," and majestic Western tableaux, such as Thomas Hill's "View in the Sierra Nevada." Folksier items, including carousel animals from a private collection and an intriguing watercolor by the outsider artist Henry Darger—an army of round-eyed pixies in pretty frocks, frolicking under a resplendent sky—will be put up for sale two days later (Sept. 24). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Nostalgia gives way to glitter

at Sotheby's sale of jewels on Sept. 24, including an eye-popping thirty-carat emerald-cut diamond ring (as well as two diamond-encrusted koala-bear brooches, by Graff). On Sept. 29, the house shifts its attention to mid-priced contemporary art, with such items as a gouache by Calder, an oil by Tom Wesselmann depicting the lipstick lips of a smoker mid-puff, and one

of Nick Cave's rustling, totem-like "Soundsuits." (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • On Sept. 24, Swann holds an auction of nineteenth- and twentieth-century prints and drawings, led by works by Schiele ("Schlafender Mann," a watercolor), Picasso, and Miró (the cheerful aquatint "Le Permissionnaire"). (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

### READINGS AND TALKS

#### Morbid Anatomy Museum

Julie Tibbott, the author of "Members Only: Secret Societies, Sects, and Cults Exposed," gives a lecture, accompanied by a slide show, surveying the history of secretive groups with strongholds in New York, from the nineteenth-century Know-Nothing Party to the current cult of La Santa Muerte. (424 Third Ave., Brooklyn. morbidanatomymuseum.org. Sept. 23 at 8.)

#### Cooper Union

A tribute to the former Poet Laureate of the United States Philip Levine, who died in February of this year, will feature readings by poets including Juan Felipe Herrera, Edward Hirsch, Sharon Olds, Yusef Komunyakaa, and David St. John. (7 E. 7th St. Sept. 24 at 7.)

#### McNally Jackson Books

The Chilean poet and novelist Alejandro Zambra reads from his first collection of short stories, "My Documents," which examines the repercussions of computer technology and of the Pinochet regime in Chile. He's joined for a discussion by the writers Francisco Goldman and Valeria Luiselli and by his editor, Daniel Gumbiner, of McSweeney's. (52 Prince St. mcnellyjackson.com. Sept. 27 at 7.)



# FOOD & DRINK

## BAR TAB DANTE

79-81 Macdougall St. (212-982-5275)

When the original Caffé Dante opened on Macdougall Street, in 1915, neighborhood Italians anointed it their second home. In the seventies, sidewalk tables faced Bob Dylan's front door. So when the beloved café closed this spring, and the sprightly Australian restaurateur Linden Pride promised a replacement with "aquatic delights" and "kicked-up" cocktails, such as a Pimm's cup "garnished extravagantly with 'salad,'" he became the neighborhood's de-facto villain. But on a recent evening at the revamped Dante, Pride was embraced by newcomers and locals alike. A woman in her sixties presented him with a decades-old photo of herself waitressing in the café. Nearby, a group of young professionals raced to order Negroni Coffee Swizzles—"tastes like tobacco," one said admiringly—before the Negroni happy hour ended. "It wasn't the Australians who lost Dante," the former waitress said. The old owners' Hail Mary renovation, in 2014, vacuumed away the charm and replaced it with airport-lounge sameness. At least Pride's swanky Dante—imagine an Italian aperitivo bar designed by Wes Anderson—has life again. Two regulars from Montenegro approved, despite nostalgia's hefty price tag: most cocktails will set you back fourteen dollars. One said, "We always sit out here, facing the street. Could be whatever behind us." His friend said, "I still expect to find the Adriatic on the other side of Macdougall."

—Becky Cooper



## TABLES FOR TWO

### WILDAIR

142 Orchard St. (646-964-5624)

**LIKE SOLANGE KNOWLES**, Wildair is the younger, possibly cooler sister of an older, more established star—the affordable-tasting-menu mecca Contra, on the Lower East Side. Located two doors down, this new wine bar with elaborate snacks does its own thing—its name alone suggests a level of liberation that eldest siblings wouldn't dare attempt—but there is no mistaking the lineage, or the feeling that we've seen this before. There's house-baked bread, three dollars at Contra, four dollars here. The charming mini peasant loaf has a fermented, dense crumb, and is served with an aromatic olive oil that's refreshingly devoid of descriptors on the menu—this is not the kind of place to serve unprovenanced olive oil, but it also has the good manners not to brag.

You can't blame the chefs, Jeremiah Stone and Fabian von Hauske, for reprising and remixing some of Contra's greatest hits; on Wildair's ever-evolving menu, they dream up consistently interesting tweaks to classic dishes. One night, charcoal-gray squid-ink aioli and fried lemon slices electrified a prim plate of calamari. A generous helping of sushi-standard spicy tuna was spread across vast swaths of bread and topped with an unrecognizable frizzle of scallions, like giant Japanese bruschetta—certain proof, if you needed it, that the eighties are back and better than ever. A small portion of perfectly tender swordfish kept nice company with al-dente cranberry beans and a mild romesco, while a thick slab of breaded pork Milanese found a good buddy in an egg-laden gribiche sauce.

Liberation often goes hand in hand with trying weird new things, and oddities abound here. Tartares, granitas, granolas, and smears (all reminiscent of the original Isa, in Williamsburg, where Stone worked with Ignacio Mattos) keep showing up, sometimes less to comfort than to confuse. The beef tartare, cut in disconcertingly bulky cubes, was topped with smoked cheddar, but all of it was lost to the overpowering flavor of vinegar. Arugula and figs blanketed a strangely flavorless, and seemingly endless, smear of boudin noir, the earthiness of which did little to help the dish. But the scallop tartare, studded with oroblanco grapefruit supremes and sitting in a deep-green pool of zesty cucumber-jalepeño-kale juice, was gorgeous to look at and wonderful to eat.

Little sisters tend to be cute, and Wildair is no exception—from the preponderance of adorable wine labels (the unexpected list includes mostly organic and natural bottles) displayed on the shelves to the recurring circle motifs in the superb pig-tail-terrine salad, the pork rillettes, the hazelnut tart, and many other dishes, to the Prouvé-lookalike barstools. It might be trying too hard to be noticed, or it might just be original.

—Shauna Lyon

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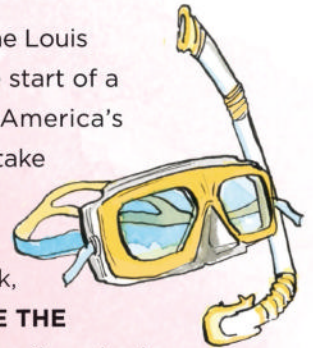


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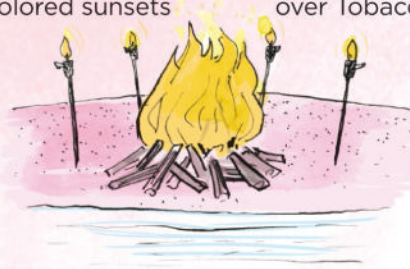
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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT DINNER TALK

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, in 1949, the United States has given the nation the full splendor of a state visit—including a twenty-one-gun salute and a black-tie dinner—on just three occasions, each at a different political moment. For instance, when President Jiang Zemin visited, in 1997, he was a reluctant supplicant. China was saddled with sanctions brought on by the crackdown in Tiananmen Square, and it craved investment—its economy then was smaller than Italy's. Though Jiang was hounded by human-rights protesters, he took pains to charm his hosts, donning a three-cornered hat in Colonial Williamsburg and dancing the hula in Hawaii.

President Xi Jinping, who is scheduled to make his first state visit this week, is less inclined to entertain. China's economy, by one measure, is now the world's largest, and its military is a growing force in Asia. When Obama and Xi last met, in Beijing in November, they agreed to reduce carbon emissions and to improve military communication. In Washington, they are likely to expand on those agreements, and to send reassuring signals to investors, after a summer of stock-market turmoil. Still, tensions in the world's most important diplomatic relationship are unmistakably climbing.

Xi arrives just as both countries are experiencing a wave of nationalism. Last month, after a drop in China's stock markets and a devaluation of its currency triggered a plunge on Wall Street, Donald Trump, the Republican Presidential front-runner, called on President Obama to cancel Xi's gala and "get him a McDonald's hamburger." Trump also demanded "a big uncoupling" of the two economies, and tariffs on Chinese imports of up to twelve per cent. "They want our people to starve," he told Fox News. "They're taking our business away." Despite the fact that China is now America's third-largest export market, other candidates followed suit. But the impact of the campaign rhetoric has been limited in China, where hardly anyone had

previously heard of Trump, or Chuanpu, as he is known in Mandarin, and the *Global Times*, a state-run newspaper, reassured its readers that, during election seasons, American politicians frequently discover that criticizing China is "not only good for shock value but also safe for them; candidates can treat it as a useful tool with no consequences."

Recently, China has sent its own wary, often conflicting messages to the United States. As the economic boom has slowed, the Party has promoted an alternative source of legitimacy, emphasizing the Communists' triumph in ending a "century of humiliation," suffered at the hands of Japan and Western imperial powers. Fearful that Western values will undermine its rule, the Party is considering a new law that would constrain nongovernment organizations—including even ones as apolitical as study-abroad programs. *People's Daily*, the Party's official mouthpiece, maintains an online page entitled "America's Strategy to Contain China Will Never Change." Since Xi took office, in 2012, government-run media outlets have escalated warnings about foreign "hostile forces" conspiring to destabilize Hong Kong.

Foreign companies describe the atmosphere as less welcoming. When the stock market slid, *Financial News*, another official paper, accused Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and other investment banks of provoking a market "stampede," and theorized that foreigners were trying to stop China from becoming a financial rival. (The actual role of foreign investors in Chinese stock markets is minimal; UBS estimates that foreigners hold about one per cent of China's \$6.4-trillion domestic market value.)

At a grand military parade in Beijing this month, marking the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, President Xi announced a cut of three hundred thousand members of the armed forces—more than a tenth of the personnel—in an effort to consolidate and modernize the military. "War is the sword



of Damocles that still hangs over mankind,” Xi said, before ushering a flotilla of tanks, drones, and other weapons down the Avenue of Eternal Peace. For the first time, China paraded its DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missiles, which American military analysts call “carrier killers,” because they could deny U.S. aircraft carriers access to the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Neither side is pursuing a military confrontation, but both perceive a growing risk of misadventure: China is building maritime bases in disputed parts of the South China Sea, and deploying ships and warplanes to police them. The U.S. Navy is adding ships to the region, and vessels and planes have had dangerous near-misses.

Among the preparations leading up to Xi’s visit, the thorniest subject has proved to be hacking—not cyber espionage, which many countries, including the United States, use to gather intelligence about other governments, but hacking of corporate secrets and intellectual property. For years, the Obama Administration and American businesses declined to discuss the breadth of attacks traced to China, in the hope of quietly solving the problem and preserving relations. But the business community has lost patience. In the past year, the F.B.I. has reported a fifty-three-per-cent rise in the number of Chinese cyber attacks aimed at commercial espionage. Earlier this month, the White House threatened to

put sanctions on Chinese companies and individuals. Beijing immediately dispatched Meng Jianzhu, a member of the Politburo, for negotiations, and the idea was set aside. But, last Wednesday, in an unusually blunt statement, Obama said that cyber theft is an “act of aggression” that will be met with “countervailing actions” unless both sides can rapidly agree to rules of conduct.

Amid the anxieties, it is easy to overlook a powerful fact: trade between China and the U.S. has grown from \$2 billion in 1979 to \$592 billion last year, making the two nations more interdependent than ever before. Compared with the chaos of the Middle East and the frozen conflict in Ukraine, East Asia remains a relative oasis. According to a Pew survey, Americans under the age of thirty hold more favorable views of China than do older generations. When Henry Kissinger made his secret trip to Beijing, in 1971, with the aim of opening relations, the two countries were united, above all, by a common adversary. “But now we don’t have a common adversary,” Kissinger observed recently. In fact, we have a few: climate change, terrorism, nuclear proliferation. Progress on those would not require the world’s two most powerful countries to trust each other. For the moment, it may be enough for them to accept that neither is powerful enough to survive alone.

—Evan Osnos

## THE BOARDS VIRTUAL RESILIENCE



The actress Mamie Gummer spent a recent morning in midtown, in a bright, bare room in the middle of which was a desk, a bucket of ice, and the virtual-reality apparatus necessary to throw balls at cartoon otters seen standing on their hind legs in a landscape of mountains, woodland, and caves filled with glowing green crystals.

Gummer was wearing jeans torn at the knee, and had her hair tied up, in the businesslike style adopted by her mother, Meryl Streep, when collecting awards. Gummer and a dozen others involved in the Roundabout Theatre’s production of “Ugly Lies the Bone,” a new play, were meeting for the first time, and the dominant tone was one of measured courtesy—as at a continuing-education class, or a funeral, except for the fact that Lindsey Ferrentino, the play’s writer, was in a café in D.C., on a cell-phone FaceTime connection that caused Stéphane Grappelli to leak, tinnily, into the room.

Gummer took notes, while listening to Howard Rose, the soft-spoken C.E.O. of a company that designs virtual-reality environments similar to the one that, in the play, brings relief to Gummer’s character, a U.S. soldier who has returned home from Afghanistan with severe burns.

Rose asked his audience about their previous virtual-reality experience. After a pause, there was scattered talk of an old Arnold Schwarzenegger movie whose title nobody could quite remember. Rose then described his part, eight years ago, in making *Spider-World*, a product for arachnophobes; it placed them in a virtual kitchen containing what Rose conceded was a “cheap and cheesy” tarantula—a laboratory of fight or flight. Rose also helped create *SnowWorld*, in which snowballs, snowmen, and flying fish distracted burn patients during painful wound dressings and stretching procedures.

After asking for a swivel chair and more ice, Rose introduced COOL!, a successor to *SnowWorld*. A player of COOL! drifts down the path of a river, Rose explained. “It’s a kind of Jungian thing. Nobody asks, ‘Why am I on a river?’ It’s, ‘Oh, I’m going down a river.’ And there are otters: we use otters be-

cause otters are endearing—pretty nonthreatening.” (Rose couldn’t have known that, two days later, a rabid otter would attack a teen-age girl on a paddle board in Virginia Beach; the otter was then killed, by strangulation, by the victim’s father.) “We went through a lot of iterations of otters—our early otters looked way too much like weasels,” he said.

“In V.R., you can make absolutely anything. We could make a fantastic world of fractals and rainbows and the aurora borealis and whatever, but



Mamie Gummer



people don't feel naturally comfortable in those kinds of things." He added, "Most video games are built on a play-die-repeat model. Like Angry Birds. You get three birds and then you're dead. And a dead bird doesn't help you through a pain treatment."

"Shall I do the thing?" Gummer asked.

"You should do the thing," Rose said.

Gummer sat in the swivel chair, in front of a laptop, and, following Rose's instructions, put her right hand in the bucket of ice. The idea, he explained, was to see how long she could stand it, and then see how long she could stand it while lost in COOL!. Ice ache was standing in for more violent pain.

"Can I look at my Instagram or anything?"

"No, you can't," Rose said. "And you can't talk to me."

For fifty-two seconds, nobody spoke; there was the roar of air-conditioning and, faintly, in the D.C. café, a shrieking toddler. Gummer took her reddened hand out of the ice. Rose warmed it under a heat lamp. He then helped her put on a virtual-reality headset and headphones. "I have a very small head," she said. "Why is my head so small?" She put her hand back in the ice.

Others in the room could see a flat version of her immersive headset view; she moved, at an unhurried speed over which she had no control, through meadows, then a snowscape. When she hit an otter, it sank to the ground and changed color but, apparently, survived.

After two and a half minutes, Gummer took her hand out of the ice again. Rose said that such a result—three times the resilience—is fairly common in both informal and more rigorous tests.

Gummer was giddy. "It really puts you in a kind of state of joy," she said. "Very childlike. I felt high. Like the trippiest Disneyland ride." Instead of thinking of the ice, "I was thinking about the otters and how happy they seemed when I blew them up. We became pals. Could I use that during childbirth?"

—Ian Parker

## FACELIFT DEPT. PAINT JOB



On a balmy Sunday not long ago, Sewall Hodges stood on the Brooklyn Heights Promenade, paintbrush in hand, regarding a garbage can. It was rusted, its black paint was chipped, and it had been marked by several dogs. "I could do the top in green and the rest in black, or I could alternate green and black every other bar," he said. He wore sneakers and work gloves, and carried a canvas bag filled with brushes and cans of paint. "Or I could throw in some red. I'm not van Gogh over here, but it's fun to get creative."

He approached a woman sitting on a nearby bench and solicited her opinion. "I'd go with all black," she said. "I'm pretty simple."

"I'm a very complex guy," Hodges said. "You and I could never get married."

There was an awkward silence. "Do you mind if I ask what you're doing?" the woman said.

"I see things that need touching up, and I come out here and touch them up," Hodges said.

"Could you get in trouble?" she asked.

"There's a law against defacing public property," Hodges said. "Does it look like I'm defacing?"

"It looks like you're painstakingly improving," she said.

"That's what I think," he said, dipping a brush in a can of turpentine.

Hodges is sixty and has lived in Brooklyn Heights since 1978. His apartment, on Montague Terrace, overlooks the Promenade. "As it's become more of a tourist attraction, the city has been pretty good at responding to the obvious things," he said. "If a water fountain stops working, they'll send someone. But something gradual, like paint corroding—after a while, people don't even notice. Well, I notice. I've always sort of been that way." He is an investment manager, but everyone needs a hobby. "There was a mailbox right outside my door, covered in graffiti. Some of these graffiti guys are amazing artists, but not this one. My neighbor and I must have called the city

hot line fifty times. Nothing. So I started thinking, Ask not what your city—I'll just buy a damn paintbrush, you know?"

Over the past five years, Hodges has repainted about a hundred pieces of public property in Brooklyn Heights—tree guards, fire hydrants, lampposts. His specialty is call boxes, which were used to summon the fire department before the advent of the household telephone and are now mostly decorative. "The call boxes have a lot of pressed metalwork in them, but the city just paints them one shade of red, so you can't really see the detail," he said. "I try to bring out that stuff." Some of his neighbors admire him; some resent him; most, being New Yorkers, ignore him. When police notice him, they usually wave, smile, and keep moving. He has never been arrested. His brush technique isn't perfect, but he makes things look brighter. He uses Rust-Oleum paint, mostly the five colors—black, white, red, blue, green—that are available at Bruno's Hardware Center, on Court Street. "They're not the exact shades the city uses, but they're close enough," he said. "Blue is blue, as far as I'm concerned."

The boyfriend of the woman on the bench arrived, carrying iced coffees and breakfast sandwiches. Hodges, stuck on the theme of marriage, said, "Your girlfriend here was just complaining that you haven't popped the question yet."

The woman blushed. "I was not!" she said.

"It's funny, we were sort of discussing that earlier," the man said.

"We don't have to do this right now," the woman said.

"I mean, we have been together for about a year," the man said.

"Can we talk about paint?" she said.

Hodges finished the garbage can (green with black trim) and taped a "Wet Paint" sign to a nearby pole. Then he moved north and picked out a water fountain. He sat on the ground and started to scrape away rust. "This area wasn't always so pretty," he said. "I remember the Guardian Angels vividly. I don't compare myself with what they did, but you do sometimes feel like if we all took care of our own space, wouldn't everyone be better off?"

Lunchtime. He sat on a bench and unwrapped an Italian sub. Ruth Henderson, a woman in her eighties wearing a yellow sun hat, sat next to him. "I've

been watching you," she said. "Are you doing this to pick up women?"

"Are you asking me out?" Hodges said.

"Who said I would go out with you?"

Henderson said. "I already have three sons. One lives a few blocks from here, with his husband."

Hodges finished his sandwich and opened a can of primer. Nila, who is nine, and Selma, who is seven, walked by with their father.

"You should make it yellow," Nila said, pointing to the water fountain.

"Turquoise!" Selma said. "With flowers. And rainbows. And gold sparkles."

"And crystals," Nila said.

"Crystals?" Hodges said. "That sounds difficult."

"It's not difficult," Nila said. "Just go to the mountains. I think they have crystals there."

—Andrew Marantz

## OLD HAUNTS DEPT. BIG SILKY



On a recent Monday morning, Ruth Reichl, the sixty-seven-year-old food writer and adoptive hippie mom to scores of the gastronomically inclined, stood at the corner of Grand and Mott, prying open a plastic container of white

mush. "This old lady over there had *doufu bua* in this big pot!" she said. "It's hot tofu with sweet sauce. It's, like, one of the best things you can buy in this city for a dollar and a half." She took a couple of rapturous bites, then offered it to a new acquaintance—"We just have one spoon, you don't have anything wrong with you, do you?"

The evening before, Reichl had driven in from Spencertown, upstate, where she and her husband, Michael, have decamped while their son, Nick, occupies their Upper West Side apartment. She'd left Michael dinner to microwave: a bison chili, the recipe for which appears in her new cookbook, "My Kitchen Year: 136 Recipes That Saved My Life." The book chronicles how, in a deep funk after the demise of *Gourmet*, where she'd been the editor for a decade, Reichl comforted herself with cheesecake, chicken-liver pâté, and creamed lobster claws on toasted brioche (a "spectacularly luxurious breakfast"). Its tone swings from histrionic ("I'd forgotten that loss can be so painful, that life can feel so bleak. I looked into the future seeing endless empty days") to orgiastic ("Golden toast crisped in butter. Thick. Soft. Hint of orange. Touch of maple. Egg rich. Cinnamon dusted. So good").

Wearing a zebra-striped vest, and her thatch of Joan Baez hair loose, Reichl entered DiPalo's, an Italian specialty store (est. 1925) and received a kiss on each cheek from Lou DiPalo. She got

down to business: "I need some Parmigiano." DiPalo hoisted wheels onto the counter and began extolling the virtues of milk from cows fed on wildflowers. He recalled, "Ruth lived in this neighborhood years ago. Except I never knew her as Ruth. I knew her as the lady who used to come in here and *shop*."

"There'd be this huge line of people," Reichl said. "At that time, I always thought of them as the Mafia moms."

"I plead the Fifth on that," DiPalo said.

"They'd just give you recipes!" Reichl continued, including one for fresh pasta, which appeared in her first cookbook, "Mmmmm: A Feasty" (out of print; \$241.15–\$2,283 on Amazon). It was published in 1972, when she was twenty-two. She lived on Rivington Street, between the Bowery and Chrystie. "When people stole cars, they brought them there to strip them," she said. The Puerto Rican women who sat at their windows would shoo away anyone who showed an interest in Reichl's beat-up Renault.

Next stop was Chinatown's vast Deluxe Food Market. "Don't these look great?" Reichl said of gumball-size octopuses; she deemed marinated beef omasum (tripe) "beautiful" and "incredible," before getting distracted by a black-skinned chicken. Its label read "Big Silky." "Maybe I should buy one of those silkies," she said, and then thought better of it. "I'll content myself with a squab."

A young man in a hot-pink shirt walked up to Reichl. "I am a chef!" he said, and asked if she knew how to prepare black chicken—perhaps because she was Ruth Reichl, or perhaps because no one else was speaking English.

"I wish I could give you a recipe for it," Reichl lamented. "I've eaten it in China, but I can't remember."

She stepped outside to call Bruce Cost, of artisanal-ginger-ale fame, for black-chicken advice. She said into the phone, "They look like they don't have much fat on them, that they'd want to be stewed more than fried or roasted." The chef emerged. Reichl shouted, "Turns out those black chickens are medicinal." She returned to the call, and exclaimed, "The bones are black?"

She headed north, to the Parisi bakery, to pick up lard bread, which has prosciutto baked into the dough, then swung by her old building. "It hasn't changed,"



"Look, just nuke them and build something terrific."



she noted, with satisfaction. The front door was covered with stickers. One read, “Famous in Bushwick.” “That was a bodega over there,” Reichl gestured across the street toward a boutique.

Northeast to Russ & Daughters for trout and salmon roe and herring in cream. She recalled a shop on Ludlow Street, “where these women would come in limousines in their fur coats, and they’d go into this grubby little base-



*Ruth Reichl*

ment where this guy in a blood-stained apron ground the stuff for gefilte fish.” Josh Russ Tupper greeted Reichl and mentioned that he’d bought a house near Spencertown. Reichl invited him over for dinner sometime.

Out on Houston Street, a man in a ripped T-shirt approached. “Help me get some food, please,” he said. Reichl handed him a ten. “I can’t believe that! Thank you, baby. I mean sister, big sister.” Reichl said, “I’ll take baby.” As she walked up First Avenue, she mused, “It’s really hard to walk around buying caviar and have someone tell you he’s hungry and say no.”

—Emma Allen

## THE PICTURES DRIVE-BY



History was in open rebellion in Dumbo the other day. Cars had fins, and men wore boxy suits. Pacing up and down the block was a tall septuagenarian named Lenny Shiller,

from Midwood, Brooklyn. He was on the set of Steven Spielberg’s new movie, “Bridge of Spies”—about a U.S.-Soviet prisoner swap at the height of the Cold War. “There’s a lot of waiting around on movies,” he said. “It causes agita.” Shiller held a flip phone to his ear and wore grease-stained bluejeans and a tattered hat. “You see this jacket and cap?” he said. “All authentic stuff. I even have a period hearing aid!”

A few weeks earlier, Shiller had received a call: Spielberg needed “period cars,” and one vehicle in particular—a six-ton evergreen-colored 1947 International KB-6 soda truck. Shiller, who is an antique-car collector, had it. Stencilled on its front and flanks, in dark green letters, is the name of its original owner, Scholz Bros., a defunct beverage company from College Point, Queens. “They call me the Jay Leno of Brooklyn,” Shiller said. (He has sixty-four cars stashed in two garages, one in Gowanus and the other in Park Slope.) He bought the soda truck in 1989, for six hundred and fifty dollars, after hearing that the director Paul Mazursky had requested an old truck for “Enemies: A Love Story.” Lining the truck’s bed were battered wooden crates and engraved-glass seltzer bottles (mostly empties, but some with period swill). The truck appeared in the Mazursky film, and then in “Malcolm X” and “Pollock.” At almost every turn, Shiller was behind the wheel, playing the soda man.

For the past three decades, Shiller has supplied and driven cars for the movies. He worked with Spike Lee (“People always bad-mouth him, but he’s a real pro”), Robert Redford (“A gentleman, loves cars”), and Woody Allen (“We went to the same public school. He kept asking me about an old principal of ours named Eudora Fletcher”). In “Bullets Over Broadway,” he drove a 1928 Packard—a “drive-by,” in Shiller parlance. While filming “Quiz Show” (’49 woody wagon), he had a run-in with some union guys. “On set, a teamster stole my shoes,” he said. He taught Chris Penn how to drive stick in “The Funeral” (’37 LaSalle), and he drove Chloë Sevigny around in “The Last Days of Disco” (’75 Checker cab).

To the other drivers on the set, Shiller was the godfather, a legend who’d given up on the movies and returned to tinkering in his garage. “I thought you pretty much retired from this,” a driver named Victor Coiro said.

He handed Shiller a wad of cash. “My dues,” he said. (Shiller is the president of the Antique Automobile Association of Brooklyn.) Another driver, in a gray suit, marched past with a walkie-talkie. “Guy thinks he’s Tom Hanks,” Shiller said. Coiro was impressed. “He’s got a real period look, that guy. You know, he actually had a speaking part in ‘Boardwalk Empire.’”

By midafternoon, the streets were clearing in anticipation of the arrival of Spielberg, who’d spent the morning filming in Manhattan. A blue water truck sprayed the streets clean, as a black Escalade pulled up. The director, in a dark cardigan, striped tie, and fedora, stepped out. Shiller stood by his truck while Spielberg inspected the vehicles. He walked up to the soda truck and nodded. Shiller let out a big sigh, as though he’d been holding his breath.

More waiting around. When Spielberg called action, three hours later, the soda truck was a stage of activity. One actor stood on the bed and handed crates to another. But Shiller had been cut. (“They said to me, ‘We need actual actors.’ Can you believe that?”) He did drive two other cars—neither of them his—in a string of takes. One of them was a ’59 pink-and-beige Rambler (twenty yards on Plymouth Street, straight out of the frame); the other was a baby-blue ’55 Chevy (fifteen yards, then a left turn onto Pearl Street).

By six-thirty, the shooting had wrapped, and Shiller got back behind the wheel of his truck. He rolled down the window and slung out his left arm, then, with his right, tugged at a gear shift the size of a baseball bat. He headed up the block toward the tow truck that would drag him home. (Shiller keeps his cars in driving shape, but he likes to keep their encounters with actual driving to a minimum.) Once he was hooked up, he honked the horn twice and shouted out the window, “Now, this is what I call power steering.”

—Jonathan Blitzer



LETTER FROM CHARLESTON

# BLOOD AT THE ROOT

*In the aftermath of the Emanuel Nine.*

BY DAVID REMNICK



In the winter of 2008, Barack Obama was in no way guaranteed the African-American vote in the Democratic primaries. He had split the opening contests, Iowa and New Hampshire, with Hillary Clinton, and had narrowly won more delegates in Nevada, yet the black voters of South Carolina, particularly the middle-aged and graying churchgoers who come out to the polls in great numbers, were torn. At first, some knew so little about him that they were not sure he was black. Others, following the lead of well-known figures in the old civil-rights establishment, felt warmly toward the Clintons and saw no reason to break

with them. There was also a more visceral concern: many African-American voters told Obama's volunteers in South Carolina that they could not shake the memory of the many black leaders over the decades who had met a violent end. When they looked at Barack Obama, hope and change was not the only future they could imagine.

Anton Gunn, a self-confident young community organizer, told Obama's campaign chiefs in Chicago that if they wanted to win the state they needed to hire him and follow his advice. The Clintons had already enlisted many black leaders in South Carolina—politicians, pastors, downtown business

people—but the Obama campaign could still win, Gunn said, by targeting the “Miss Mary”s, older women who were centers of good will and polite gossip in the black churches, who had a hand in every charity event and Bible-study group. To win the younger black vote, Gunn told the campaign chiefs, they should, in classic hip-hop fashion, distribute free mixtapes of Obama's best stump performances. Obama, who had to erase any lingering impression that he was a callow newcomer, came to Sumter County and, echoing the language of Malcolm X as portrayed by Denzel Washington, told an enthusiastic crowd, “Don't let people turn you around, because they're just making stuff up. That's what they do. They try to bamboozle you, hood-wink you.”

But that was not quite enough. A CBS poll before the primary said that forty per cent of the black voters in the state believed that the country was not ready to elect an African-American President. The campaign planned an event that was intended to resonate more deeply with black South Carolina, particularly with its Miss Marys. The event was to take place in the town of Orangeburg. In 1968, after protests against a segregated bowling alley, police shot into a crowd of black college students, killing three and injuring dozens more. This became known as the Orangeburg Massacre. Michelle Obama went to Orangeburg as her husband's surrogate. Born on the South Side of Chicago, she was descended from Low Country slaves who worked in the rice fields around Georgetown, South Carolina. At the rally, she assured the crowd that her husband was “running to be the President who finally lifts up the poor and forgotten,” and gently prodded her listeners to tear away the “veil of impossibility . . . that keeps us waiting and hoping for a turn that may never come.” She ended on a note of solidarity and daring: “Imagine our family on that inaugural platform. America will look at itself differently.”

On January 26th, Obama crushed Hillary Clinton and John Edwards in South Carolina, sweeping the black vote and winning fifty-five per cent of the vote over all. The victory secured

*A surface tone of conciliation, some argue, prevents political change in Charleston.*





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the black vote for Obama during the rest of the campaign and a lead in the primaries that he never lost. At the victory celebration in Columbia, Obama told his volunteers that they had assembled “the most diverse coalition of Americans that we’ve seen in a long, long time.”

The crowd answered Obama in full-throated euphoria: “Race doesn’t matter! Race doesn’t matter!”

At around nine-thirty on the morning of April 4, 2015, midway through Obama’s second term as President, Michael Slager, a white police officer in North Charleston, South Carolina, shot and killed a Coast Guard veteran and forklift operator, a black man of fifty named Walter Scott. Slager had pulled Scott over and told him that one of his brake lights was out of commission. He took Scott’s license and walked back to his squad car. Scott, who had a series of arrests on his record, mainly for non-payment of child support, left his car and began to lumber away. There was a brief struggle as Slager tried to zap Scott with his Taser. Scott escaped at a heavy-legged trot. Slager unholstered his gun and, from a distance of no more than twenty feet, shot at Scott eight times, killing him as calmly as a hunter puts down a hobbled deer.

There were no uprisings in North Charleston, as there were in Ferguson and Baltimore, no public displays of mass outrage. Race, it turned out, had not ceased to matter, but forgiveness and forbearance, a spiritual tradition and a temperament rooted in the black church, the most powerful of all African-American institutions, prevailed. Clementa C. Pinckney, a Democrat in the state senate and the pastor of Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston—the oldest historically black church in the state—led a rally in North Charleston and campaigned to have police wear body cameras. He also showed an almost unfathomable degree of empathy, and not only with the victims. “Our hearts go out to the Scott family, and our hearts go out to the Slager family,” Pinckney said. “Because the Lord teaches us to love all.”

Two months later, on the steamy

evening of June 17th, Dylann Roof, a twenty-one-year-old ninth-grade dropout, his imagination roiling with Confederate romance and a demented determination to spark a race war, slipped through a side entrance at Emanuel A.M.E. carrying a .45-calibre Glock semiautomatic that he had bought with his birthday money and eight magazines filled with hollow-point bullets. Roof sat down in a Bible-study class with a dozen congregants,



putting himself near the teacher, Clementa Pinckney. Roof seemed to listen as Pinckney led a discussion of the parable of the sower, in the Gospel of Mark, but he was gathering his nerve. Writing on a Web site called “The Last Rhodesian,” Roof had portrayed himself as a lonely soldier of racial purity forced to take solitary action: “We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.”

Finally, Roof, a slouchy, slender blond boy with a bowl haircut, stood up from his chair and fired repeatedly. “We were just about to say the prayer to be released,” Felicia Sanders, who survived, along with her eleven-year-old granddaughter and her friend Polly Sheppard, told a reporter for NBC. “He caught us with our eyes closed.” After the firing began, Sanders lay on the floor and clutched and covered her granddaughter with such force that she feared she would smother her. She could not protect her twenty-six-year-old son, Tywanza, who was shot several times.

As he lay bleeding on the floor, Tywanza said to Roof, “Why are you doing this?”

“Y’all are raping our women and taking over the country,” Roof answered.

Sanders watched her son die shortly

afterward. One surviving witness recalled that Roof said, “You want something to pray about? I’ll give you something to pray about.” After firing more than seventy times—“I heard every shot,” Felicia Sanders said—Roof pointed the gun at his own head only to discover that he had not left a bullet for himself. As he was leaving the room, he saw Polly Sheppard, hiding under a table and praying.

“Shut up,” he said. “Did I shoot you yet?”

“No,” she replied.

“I’m going to let you live so you can tell the story of what happened.”

Roof killed nine people, including Clementa Pinckney. In the weeks since the massacre, the Mother Emanuel church, white, angular, and as elegant as an origami crane, has become at once a shrine and a morbid tourist attraction. Small clutches of visitors stand outside the church and stare up at its doors, as if to summon a greater understanding of what took place behind them. They lay carnations next to moldering wreaths and write messages of condolence on placards, a fire hydrant, the narrow trunk of a tree. They stay a few minutes, then trail off to other sites. A block away, in Marion Square, they encounter a statue of John C. Calhoun, the outspoken proponent of states’ rights, secession, and slavery. They take the ferry to Fort Sumter. They visit the city market on Meeting Street and the Old Slave Mart Museum, on Chalmers Street. They shop. They have a beer at Closed for Business and the bacon corn bread at Husk.

Inside Emanuel, a pastor in his mid-sixties named Norvel Goff, Sr., now presides where Pinckney once did. Goff may be the weariest-looking man I’ve ever seen, with hooded eyes, worry creases in his forehead, an excruciating slowness in his movements. Charged with healing Emanuel’s collective wound, he has preached every Sunday since the massacre that parishioners must show the world “the resiliency of faith”—a refusal to answer hate with hate.

Early in the Sunday service I attended recently, Goff stood near the choir receiving visitors from out of town. First came an executive from a

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private consulting group bearing a check for a hundred thousand dollars. Then came the principal of a high school in Liberty City, a predominantly black neighborhood in Miami, along with a busload of his most promising students. Goff listened to their messages of condolence with patience and gravity but also a glint of detachment, even dark humor. He bore the responsibility of graciousness not with churchy formality but with what James Baldwin called the “ironic tenacity” of the blues singer. Goff didn’t need to be told that no check, no embrace, was going to heal Mother Emanuel. The principal told Goff that he and his students had driven from Miami “just to let you know that love is greater than hate.” Goff smiled approvingly for the principal, though it seemed to require a measure of wincing discomfort to do so, and, with a slight fluttering wave, summoned the students to join him up front. Then he turned to his parishioners and said, “I want the world to know we are not in this struggle by ourselves. Praise God.”

Goff had news. Denise Quarles, who had not been in church since her mother, Myra Thompson, was shot to death in Bible class, was here today, and he asked Sister Denise to stand. A prim, handsome woman, she wore a large metallic button emblazoned with a photo of her mother. Someone handed her a microphone. “My heart grieves every day,” she managed to say. “When I see you, I see courage. When I see you, I see faith.” There was a silence, then an “Amen” from the back. “I’m sitting in the same pew, and I feel her presence when I come to Mother Emanuel,” she went on. She wanted everyone to know that “the prayers work—it’s the only reason I’m able to be here.”

The congregation sang a few verses of “I’ll Be All Right Someday,” and Goff came to the pulpit to preach. “Sometimes, I’m a little weary and worn,” he began. “Since June 17, 2015, many from around the country and in Charleston ask the question: ‘How are you? How is Mother Emanuel?’ My response is: ‘With your prayers and encouragement and with God guiding us, we’ll be all right.’” Goff made a distinction between the everyday spiritual

condition of “joy”—an intense awareness of the gift of life, the fruit of hope, joy as the very condition of being alive—and the banality of “happiness.” There was no happiness. But “even in the midst of trials and tribulations we still have joy,” Goff said, his energy finally restored. “My good days outnumber my bad days, and I will not complain.”

What Goff made clear was that members of the community were in a state of immense pain (“post-traumatic-stress syndrome” was the term they often used), but they were alive, and feeling joy in their pews—and at their jobs, and at their Bible classes and dinner tables and Sunday strolls—because of the depth of their spiritual lives. This was the way of a church that had been around since the days when enslaved black men and women, in a quest for safety, community, dignity, cohesion, empowerment, ritual, and peace, broke from white churches and built “invisible” institutions, sometimes called “hush harbors.” The black church, even as it has changed, aged, and, in some places, lost ground to mega-churches, remains a central institution of black life, and of black political influence.

Appalling as the massacre at Emanuel was, it was not the only event in Charleston that shocked the country. At Dylann Roof’s arraignment hearing, relatives of the Emanuel Nine, one after another, stepped up to forgive the man behind the massacre. “You took something very precious away from me,” Nadine Collier, the daughter of Ethel Lance, said, addressing the accused. “I will never get to talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again, but I forgive you, and have mercy on your soul. You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. But God forgives you and I forgive you.” Myra Thompson’s husband said, “I forgive you and my family forgives you. But we would like you to take this opportunity to repent. Repent. Confess. Give your life to the one who matters the most: Christ. So that he can change it, can change your ways, no matter what happens to you, and you’ll be O.K.” Felicia Sanders also forgave Roof and later told Jennifer Berry Hawes, of the Charles-

ton *Post & Courier*, why. “I didn’t want any riots here,” she said. “Why do I need to get up there and cause chaos, and then other kids would get killed and the neighborhood would get hurt? Let the judicial system handle it.”

The tradition of forgiveness in the black church is long. In 1974, six years after Martin Luther King, Jr., was gunned down in Memphis, his mother, Alberta Williams King, was playing the organ at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, a hundred yards or so from her son’s grave, in downtown Atlanta, when a young man, firing two pistols, killed her and a church deacon. But, just as Martin Luther King, Sr., had forgiven his son’s assassin, Christine King Farris forgave her mother’s killer. “Hate won’t bring my mother or brother back,” she told the magazine *Jet*. “It would only destroy me.”

James H. Cone, an exponent of black-liberation theology whose books include “Martin & Malcolm & America” and “The Cross and the Lynching Tree,” grew up in rural Arkansas and in the A.M.E. Church. The forgiveness shown by the relatives of the Emanuel Nine was hard to understand for anyone “who hasn’t had to cope with that kind of powerlessness,” he said. “It’s victory out of defeat. It is the weak overcoming the strong. It’s ‘You can’t destroy my spirit. I have a forgiving spirit because that’s what God created me to be. You are not going to destroy that.’ When they forgive, it is a form of resistance, a kind of resilience. It is not bowing down. That is misunderstood by a lot of people, even black people, and even some black ministers. It’s part of that tragic experience of trying to express your humanity in the face of death and not having any power.”

Clementa Pinckney “combined the spirituality and the political challenge that black people face,” Cone said. “That church was a symbol of that. Black people are a small minority, and we can’t use physical violence. That’s not a possibility. It has to be a spiritual resistance, which is a different thing. And he represented that kind of spiritual—defiant but spiritual—resistance. I was not surprised by Charleston. White people have never regarded us as human beings. There is a deep fear in me still

that when I walk out on the street I will end up dead. The power is still there. I have sons who don't feel like that. They didn't experience the violence that I knew was there in the South."

The Reverend Joseph Darby, the former pastor of Morris Brown A.M.E. Church, in Charleston, and a leader of the state chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., is revered among the black-church elders of South Carolina. He is also the least restrained among them. He was sympathetic when the mayor and the governor led a peaceful march of solidarity after the massacre. He shed a tear when the Confederate flag outside the statehouse was lowered, having helped to lead the campaign against it in the first place. But Reverend Darby told me one morning recently at the Harbour Club, downtown, that all the "kumbaya stuff" will be meaningless without combatting the institutional racism that still defines the state "and the state of the union": underfunded, segregated schools, neglected black towns, unjust voter-I.D. laws, gentrification and joblessness in the cities, outsized rates of African-Americans in prison. The surface tone of conciliation, Darby and many others believe, helps to smother the possibility of political change in places like Charleston.

"You have a city infected with raging politeness, relentlessly courteous to the point that no one's doing much of anything," he said. "This courtesy is hardwired into the American South, but it's hypocritical. It's a tradition draped in the antebellum lost-cause stuff, the old Southern chivalrous tradition, and it depends on an African-American population that has to go along to get along." He went on, "We have never worked through the modern civil-rights era. Laws were passed, but the relationships behind those laws have not fully formed. It's legal to go anywhere, but if you can't get a job and haven't been to the right schools you are still nowhere."

A waitress, a wiry older woman in a pink blouse, greeted Reverend Darby and poured him some coffee. "I had no idea you were with us this morning!" she said.

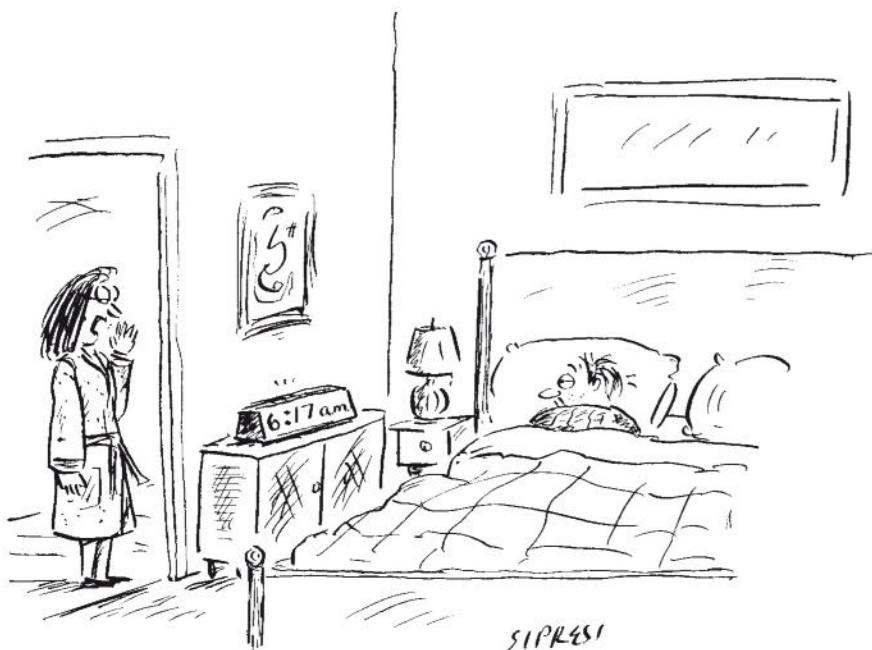
Darby smiled and engaged her in chitchat about the heroic heat and humidity before he resumed: "Remember, there was not a trace of ambiguity about what happened here. They couldn't pull out a rap sheet—these were nine people of impeccable character—and they were killed in a church by a white man who wanted to kill black people to start a race war! And he said so! So it flies in the face of any notion of post-racial America, an America so proud of itself because it elected an African-American President. Some of the reaction is driven by the need to say, 'It's not me, I'm not like that.' Dylann Roof is not that extraordinary. He is kind of typical—extreme, but typical. If you build a politic, as we have done in America since Nixon and Reagan, in which election strategies are based on distrust of the other, well, some folks will react on a political level and vote based on racial fear. The truly unbalanced will do what this kid did."

Darby, like others I talked with, was moved and encouraged by Obama's eulogy for Clementa Pinckney—and not only because of his rendition of "Amazing Grace." The speech represented a greater willingness to condemn racial injustice, both historical and present-day. Darby recalled how he used to be in on conference calls with other black preachers and Joshua DuBois, Obama's

liaison to religious leaders. "We would tell Josh, 'Let the President out of the cage! Let him be black!'" The preachers were frustrated that Obama's focus was too often on pull-up-your-pants cultural issues—"almost Cosby-esque in his rhetoric"—but the Charleston speech "rounds it out by saying America is not a fair place." Obama's term is coming to an end, Darby said, with a sly, cockeyed smile, and "he no longer has to be the least threatening black man in America."

The speech, though, will do little to change the political arrangements of Charleston. "I've been an American all my life and I've been black all my life, and there has never been a time in America when someone in power in America says, on his own, 'Let's take a different course,'" Darby said. "South Carolina has never done the right thing on its own. Slavery ended by federal intervention. Civil-rights laws passed by federal intervention. People change grudgingly."

The gentility of establishment politics in Charleston was performed one night at Mother Emanuel at a wake for Herbert Ulysses Gaillard Fielding. The scion of a prosperous funeral-home business, Fielding was among the first black politicians to win a seat in the South Carolina state legislature since



*"Wake up, Larry—you're missing the pregame."*





*"Could I please go back to the rack now?"*

Reconstruction. He was ninety-two when he died. Now he was laid out in a grand coffin flanked by wreaths of red roses and dozens of fraternity brothers wearing black suits and white gloves.

James Clyburn, a leader of the Democratic caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives and for many years the most powerful black politician in the state, spoke warmly of Fielding, even though he once ran against Fielding for Congress. The choir sang "Take My Hand, Precious Lord." Then a white funeral director got up and made what he considered a bold gesture of racial reconciliation. "In South Carolina," he said, "there have traditionally been two funeral directors' associations: one predominantly white, one predominantly African-American." It was time, he said, to merge them. "We're doing the right thing," he said, over earnest applause. "Our hearts are in the right place."

The last guest speaker was Joseph P. Riley, Jr., who has been the mayor of Charleston for forty years. Riley is white. (Charleston has never had a black mayor.) A diminutive man with

hearing aids, horn-rimmed glasses, and a shock of snowy hair, Riley is seventy-two, and, by the standards of South Carolina, he has been on the right side of history where race is concerned. In 1982, he hired Reuben Greenberg, the city's first African-American police chief, and kept him in the job until Greenberg retired, twenty-three years later. In 2000, Riley led a march from Charleston to Columbia to demand that the state legislature remove the Confederate flag from its grounds. The route was a hundred and twenty miles, and Riley, at Greenberg's insistence, wore a bullet-proof vest; he finished the march with bloody, bandaged feet. Riley has been a friend to downtown real-estate interests—and that has meant gentrification as well as development—but he also campaigned for the construction of an African-American history museum on Gadsden's wharf, where tens of thousands of slaves arrived in Charleston from present-day Togo, Benin, Angola, and Nigeria. He is stepping down this year, after ten terms.

Riley was at ease in Emanuel, and he recalled the "seismic changes" of the

civil-rights movement and praised Herbert Fielding as a man of conciliation. He said, "To many white people, uneasy with these changes, Herbert pushed too hard. He seemed like a radical to them. To some in the African-American community, Herbert's easy grace caused some to call him an Uncle Tom. The radical charge hurt, though he wasn't that. The Uncle Tom charge hurt him even more—and he wasn't that, either."

Fielding was a man of deliberation, of forbearance, of careful progress, and so are the black candidates who are hoping to succeed Riley. There are three, and the leading prospect is William Dudley Gregorie, a veteran city-council member and a trustee of Emanuel. He tried to beat Riley twice and failed. Robert Behre, who is covering the race for the *Charleston Post & Courier*, told me that Gregorie has "no real chance." The favorite so far is Leon Stavrinakis, a lawyer and state lawmaker. Stavrinakis is white.

One afternoon, I met Gregorie at his modest headquarters, in a worn-down part of town. He slumped on a couch, looking nearly as weary as Pastor Goff. Coltrane and Monk were playing on a set of small speakers in the hallway. Gregorie is active at Emanuel; he knew every one of the victims, and attended all their funerals. Susie Jackson, who, at eighty-seven, was the oldest of them, sang in the Emanuel choir; she was a close relation of his. Every so often as we talked, he would cry or just stop talking. "I am very . . . tender," he managed once, while recounting how, on the night of the killings, he waited at a hotel across the street from the church to hear who was alive and who was not. "It is so hard to talk about it."

Although Gregorie had lost two earlier races for city hall, he feels that, after the Emanuel tragedy, he's been "tested," having been on "the national stage in terms of media." He had given interviews to the national press, and he spoke briefly at Pinckney's funeral, before Obama, and was determined "to keep a lid on Charleston," to avoid any violence. This, he said, was part of his "branding" as a candidate. He said that he was introducing a resolution in the city council to plant nine oak trees in

memory of the Emanuel Nine, but he saw no good reason to get rid of the statue of Calhoun down the street: "It would be too divisive."

And yet Gregorie was not all forgiveness. There was a fury in him, too. What had happened at Emanuel, he said, was "not something new" or completely unexpected. "How could it be? Particularly in a city that is a seat of the Confederacy, a city where there were slave owners, the butchering and murdering of slaves. . . . It was evil that came into our church. Pure evil. And the only way that you can fight evil is with good. I think our church has been chosen. Do we know what for yet? No, we don't. It is an iconic church in terms of its contribution to American history."

Mother Emanuel was founded in 1816. Six years later, one of its leaders, Denmark Vesey, a carpenter who bought his freedom with winnings from the East Bay Street lottery, organized what a biographer of his, David Robertson, called "the most elaborate and well-planned slave insurrection in the history of the United States." Historians have debated the scale and the details of the plot; some say that Vesey secretly recruited thousands of slaves to kill the slave owners of Charleston, seize the arsenal in the city and the ships in the port, and then escape to Haiti, where bondage had been outlawed. The plot, whatever its actual dimensions, was uncovered, and Vesey, along with thirty-four alleged co-conspirators, was hanged. Emanuel was burned to the ground by whites shortly afterward, and was later banned until the end of the Civil War. An earthquake brought it down again in 1886; Grover Cleveland donated ten dollars toward its rebuilding. Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr., preached at Emanuel. The massacre this summer, Gregorie said, "is another part of its history. Where will it go?"

In 1955, after the conviction of Rosa Parks for violating segregation laws, and in the midst of a bus boycott, Dr. King had just minutes to prepare for a speech at Montgomery's Holt Street Baptist Church. "How could I make a speech that would be militant enough

to keep my people aroused to positive actions yet moderate enough to keep this fervor within controllable and Christian bounds?" he wondered, as he later recalled. "Could the militant and the moderate be combined in a single speech?"

Militancy with moderation and grace: it's what's behind the rhetoric of building bridges, the urge toward nonviolence and forgiveness, the refusal to surrender to hate. In the mid-sixties, younger voices in SNCC and the Black Power movement grew disillusioned with such tactics, and you see a similar disillusionment now among some of the city's younger activists. They are wary of what they consider the conservatism, even accommodationism, of the black church.

One morning, I arranged to meet Muhiyidin d'Baha, one of the organizers of Black Lives Matter Charleston, at a Starbucks downtown. The venue was ill chosen. "This is anti-revolutionary, this place!" d'Baha said. Then he smiled and ordered a caramel macchiato.

D'Baha's mother is Baha'i, and his father is a Muslim. The family moved to South Carolina from Poughkeepsie when d'Baha was thirteen. As a kid, he got in trouble for stealing cars, but then he straightened himself out and went to a good magnet school; in college, he studied psychology and played football. D'Baha is thirty, burly, and



wears beaded dreads and a Black Lives Matter T-shirt. He shows great respect to the elders of the black-church community, but he also talks about the insufficiency of "respectability politics" and the barrier that it creates between "the power establishment and the revolutionaries and disgruntled masses." The voices of forgiveness at Dylann Roof's hearing struck d'Baha as understandable in the context of the black church and the legacy of civil-rights-

era thinking but, at the same time, as a form of political masochism.

"That was Charleston," he said. "That was accommodating white feelings and white superiority. It was 'Yes, Massa, can I have another?' But, at the same time, it was spiritual fortitude forged in a crucible of terrorism. It speaks of a spiritual level that I haven't attained. What it also meant to Charleston was that, without the families' backing, we couldn't demonstrate at the pitch we wanted. Walter Scott's mom said the same thing. When the families give these signals, and the pastors instill in the families a sense of grace and forgiveness, the anger never reverberates. No leadership arose demanding to have this pain recognized. Again, it's let me accommodate you so you're not scared, we'll just get on the bridge and hold hands, Jesus is good, we're over it. There has been an arrangement here, created over generations, to be able to endure terrorism. At this point, this is the way it is. We endure. We don't ask for more."

Black Lives Matter Charleston is small and unaffiliated with the national movement (which itself is more loosely organized than its impressive influence would suggest). Women in particular have drifted away from the local group, some convinced, as one Charleston activist told me, that the group is too narrow, too splintered, and fails to "advocate for women and queer and transgender people."

Despite the modest scale of Black Lives Matter Charleston, the group, along with some other small activist organizations, held a demonstration just after the massacre at Mother Emanuel called "Burying White Supremacy," near the statue of Calhoun in Marion Square. They began by incinerating a Confederate flag, but then someone set alight a Stars and Stripes. Word got around town, and it was not considered, in all, a helpful gesture. The attempt to "shift the narrative" from conciliation to something more insistent stalled.

There are boundaries in Charleston. When d'Baha speaks in churches, he gets the sense that people are unnerved. "They don't want us to start a riot," he says, echoing Felicia Sanders. His local goals are in line with those





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of the black ministers—greater police oversight, greater attention to black schools and black neighborhoods. But his kinship is less with the civil-rights ethos of nonviolence (passive resistance, he says, was “silly” and “dehumanizing”) than with the militant tradition of SNCC, Malcolm X, and the Black Panthers.

When James Cone was developing his ideas about black-liberation theology, part of his project was to find a common home for the followers of both Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. But he still sees the differences in spiritual temperament and tactical thinking between those two poles. “Those young people today have the Internet to organize themselves, and a fierce spirituality that is not necessarily connected to the church,” he said. “The language of the Black Lives Matter movement is connected to the black body. They want society to acknowledge the threat to the black body. They are not saying these lives matter to God. They are saying that they matter to the world. They are not passive in any sense.”

Last year, after years of debate, Charleston erected a statue of Denmark Vesey in Hampton Park. It had been a struggle. When the city first agreed to put a portrait of Vesey in Gaillard Municipal Auditorium, in 1976, vandals stole it. After the portrait was recovered, it was bolted to the wall.

“Dylann Roof was striking at black resistance, and Denmark Vesey and the A.M.E. Church represent black resistance that is rooted in the nineteenth century,” Cone said. “The fact that there is now a statue of Denmark Vesey means they affirm that resistance. That resistance, any form of it, when I grew up, is what white people disliked. Deference is expected of you. Denmark Vesey would not give that deference, and that church represented a refusal to give it.”

James Campbell is one of the oldest activists in town. He is ninety, and grew up in segregated Charleston. As a young man, he knew Malcolm X and Amiri Baraka, and taught black studies in Harlem and African literature in Tanzania. In his view, the

young activists in the country, though they lack distinct memories of the segregated facilities and the lynchings of Jim Crow, are in possession of a clear sense of purpose. They are, he said, helping “to fulfill” the American Revolution. After the slaughter at Emanuel, he told me, he sent “as a homework assignment” to some young activists in Charleston a copy of a speech that W.E.B. Du Bois delivered in 1946, in Columbia, South Carolina: “Behold the Land,” an address before the Southern Negro Youth Congress. Du Bois was seventy-eight, and assured the assembled:

You do not stand alone. It may seem like a failing fight when the newspapers ignore you; when every effort is made by white people in the South to count you out of citizenship, to act as though you did not exist as human beings, while all the time they are profiting by your labor; gleaned wealth from your sacrifices and trying to build a nation and a civilization upon your gradation. You must remember that, despite all this, you have allies and allies even in the white South.

Campbell sees the massacre as a dark chapter in the late stages of a civilizational struggle, from oppression to liberation. When he was a boy, he told me, his grandmother took him to a “serious Baptist shouting church” in rural South Carolina, where nearly everyone in the pews had been born into bondage. She would tell him about life on the cotton plantation, the hideous work under the sun and the lash, the sundering of families, the humiliation and the fear. When rumors reached the plantation that the Union Army was sweeping across the South, the slaves thought that Biblical end-times were upon them. They knew nothing of liberation, only the stories of men in blue burning down the cities of the South. Freedom was beyond imagining.

“That memory is almost genetic, the DNA of the community, and I don’t think it manifests itself in rage,” Campbell said. “It manifests itself in the resolute patience of a long-suffering people. And their determination is expressed through the permanency of the church. That may wear thin with some of the younger people, but it will be a while before you see it change.” ♦

## DON'T SWAT AT THE BEE

BY KELLY STOUT

Don't swat at the bee. Stay still. Seriously, Becca, don't swat at it—that's why bees sting. It's when they feel scared. Just let it land on your arm and chill. Yeah, like that.

Pour out some of that lemonade on the sand. It might be more attracted to that than to you and just fly away.

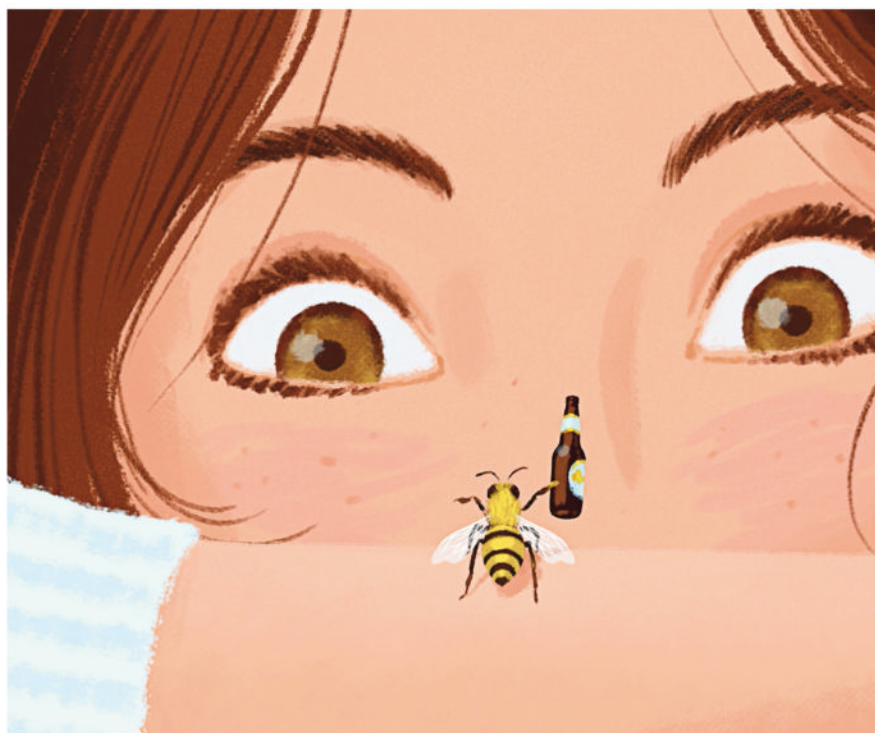
Oh, look. It's sleeping. Here, maybe

What? No, it's not going to do that. And, anyway, if it's such an expert on whiskey already, won't you want to know?

It's obviously welcome at my Halloween thing, by the way.

Girl, you are being so paranoid. Do honeybees even have stingers? Its mother is going to totally love you.

Its improv group might actually be O.K. At least go and see.



put this napkin over it as a blanket. Aw, how cute.

When it wakes up it might be hungry. Let's save it some of a burger. And don't forget to offer it a beer. Bees always get really weird when you don't offer.

Don't flick it away! Oh, my God, Becca. You're unbelievable sometimes. It likes you.

Actually, I think it could be fun to have it come with us to see "Minions." Or maybe just take it for a walk in the park? Get to know it better.

Oh, you know what you should do with it? Bring it to a whiskey tasting.

Becca, look at me. If it wants to move in with you, that's a *good* thing. I worry that sometimes you're afraid of your own happiness.

Yes, I agree that having a hive in your apartment sounds weird, but I don't straight-up hate it. It's better than the jukebox that the bee insisted on bringing.

It has a point that until there's male birth control that's, like, your responsibility, you know? I see what you're saying, but you just have to accept it for the reality of what it is. Bees hate it when you freak out about nothing.

You guys should take a weekend away. Just, like, get out of the city and be together on your own time. Without its Ultimate Frisbee teammates.

Can you leave it alone about the voting thing? Well, first of all, the bee isn't even registered, and, second, there's no way that Jeb Bush is going to win New York. So what's the point?

Becca, bees just aren't going to hurt you unless they feel threatened, and it sounds like that's what happened. I'm sure the bee is happy for you that your presentation went well, but you didn't have to rub it in its face.

Don't try to get it to join a C.S.A.

You know it loves to get the clues about swords right in the crossword. "Épée" was, like, the only one it knew, and you just filled it in without even asking. Why do you have this need to always be right?

You really have to stop giving it grief about not coming to your sister's wedding. Block Island is insanely far away!

Honestly, it sounds like you're the one being racist.

Can you just be cool? Jesus. It obviously didn't realize it was sending that photo to your work e-mail.

Yes, Becca, it read more than half of that article about the working conditions in the nail salons, and it talked with you about it for a long time. What does "a real conversation" even mean? It felt real to the bee.

Stop trying to get it to have coffee with that guy from the C.S.A. who works for his stepfather's law firm. The bee doesn't want to be a paralegal, Becca. Sorry, but the bee has actual dreams.

*Oh, my God, the bee was just having a friendly conversation with her. Don't you even trust it?*

It only used your credit card to buy Governors Ball tickets because it thought you would want to go.

Becca, I thought you should know that after you kicked the bee out it had to move back in with its sixty thousand former roommates.

Listen, the bee left its travel mug and its backup phone charger at your place. If you could just try to be cool for once, it'll come in for two seconds and then get out of your hair, and you'll never have to see it again. Happy?

I should warn you that the bee is probably going to be at my Friendsgiving. ♦



# A MODEST PROPOSAL

*Just when you thought you'd never get married.*

BY DAVID SEDARIS



London is five hours ahead of Washington, D.C., except when it comes to gay marriage. In that case, it's two years and five hours ahead, which was news to me. "Really?" I said, on meeting two lesbian wives from Wolverhampton. "You can do that here?"

"Well, *of course* they can," Hugh said when I told him about it. "Where have you been?"

Hugh can tell you everything about the current political situation in the U.K. He knows who the Chancellor of the Exchequer is, and was all caught up in the latest election for the whatever-you-call-it, that king-type person who's like the President but isn't.

"*Prime Minister?*" he said. "Jesus. You've been here *how* long?"

It was the same when we lived in Paris. Hugh regularly read the French papers. He listened to political shows on the radio, while I was, like, "Is he the same emperor we had last year?"

When it comes to American politics, our roles are reversed. "What do you mean 'Who's Claire McCaskill?'" I'll say, amazed that I—that *anyone*, for that matter—could have such an ignorant boyfriend.

I knew that the Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage was expected at 10 A.M. on June 26th, which is 3 P.M. in Sussex. I'm usually out then, on my litter patrol, so I made it a point to bring my iPad with me. When the time came, I was standing by the side of the road, collecting trash with my grabber. It's generally the same crap over and over—potato-chip bags, candy wrappers, Red Bull cans—but along this particular stretch, six months earlier, I'd come across a strap-on penis. It seemed pretty old, and was Band-Aid colored, about three inches long, and not much bigger around than a Vienna sausage, which was interesting to me. You'd think that if someone wanted a sex toy she'd go for the gold, size-wise. But this was

just the bare minimum, like getting AAA breast implants. Who was this person hoping to satisfy, her Cabbage Patch doll? I thought about taking the penis home and mailing it to one of my sisters for Christmas but knew that the moment I put it in my knapsack I'd get hit by a car and killed. That's just my luck. Medics would come and scrape me off the pavement, then, later, at the hospital, they'd rifle through my pack and record its contents: four garbage bags, some wet wipes, two flashlights, and a strap-on penis.

"There must be some mistake," Hugh would tell them. "You said it was *how* big?"

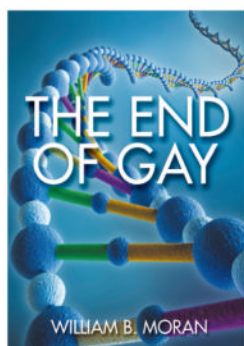
My iPad could get no signal at 3 P.M., so I continued walking and picking up trash, thinking that, whichever way the Supreme Court went, I never expected to see this day in my lifetime. When I was young, in the early seventies, being gay felt like the worst thing that could happen to a person, at least in Raleigh, North Carolina. There was a rumor that it could be cured by psychiatrists, so for most of my teens that's where I placed my hope. I figured that eventually I'd tell my mother and let her take the appropriate steps. What would kill me was seeing the disappointment on her face. With my father I was used to it. That was the expression he naturally assumed when looking at me. Her, though! Once when I was in high school she caught me doing something or other, imitating my Spanish teacher, perhaps with a pair of tights on my head, and said, like someone at the end of her rope, "What are you, a *queer*?"

I'd been called a sissy before, not by her but by plenty of other people. That was different, though, as the word was less potent, something used by children. When my mother called me a queer, my face turned scarlet and I exploded. "*Me?* What are you talking about? Why would you even *say* a thing like that?"

Then I ran down to my room, which was spotless, everything just so, the Gustav Klimt posters on the walls, the cornflower-blue vase I'd bought with the money I earned babysitting. The veil had been lifted, and now I saw

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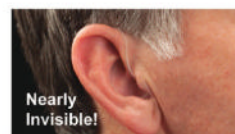
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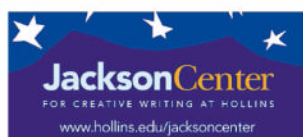
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this for what it was: the lair of a blatant homosexual.

That would have been as good a time as any to say, "Yes, you're right. Get me some help!" But I was still hoping that it might be a phase, that I'd wake up the next day and be normal. In the best of times, it seemed like such a short leap. I *did* fantasize about having a girlfriend—never the sex part, but the rest of it I had down.

I knew what she'd look like, and how she'd hold her long hair back from the flame when bending over a lit candle. I imagined us getting married the summer after I graduated from college, and then I imagined her drowning off the coast of North Carolina during one of my family's vacations. Everyone needed to be there, so they could see just how devastated I was. I could actually make myself cry by picturing it: how I'd carry her out of the water, how my feet would sink into the sand owing to the extra weight. I'd try mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and keep trying, until someone, my father most often, would pull me back, saying, "It's too late, son. Can't you see she's gone!"

It seemed that I wanted to marry just so I could be a widower. So profound would be my grief that I'd never look at another woman again. It was perfect, really. Oh, there were variations. Sometimes she'd die of leukemia, as in the movie "Love Story." Occasionally, a madman's bullet would fell her during a hostage situation, but always I'd be at her side, trying everything in my power to bring her back.

The fantasy remained active until I was twenty. Funny how unimportant being gay became once I told somebody. All I had to do was open up to my best friend, and when she accepted it I saw that I could as well.

"I just don't see why you have to rub everyone's noses in it," certain people would complain when I told them. Not that I wore it on T-shirts or anything. Rather, I'd just say "boyfriend" the way they said "wife" or "girlfriend," or "better half." I insisted that it was no different, and in time, at least in the circles I ran in, it became no different.

While I often dreamed of making

a life with another man, I never extended the fantasy to marriage, or even to civil partnerships, which became legal in France in 1999, shortly after Hugh and I moved to Paris. We'd been together for eight years by that point, and though I didn't want to break up or look for anyone else, I didn't need the government to validate my relationship. I felt the same way when a handful of American states legalized same-sex marriage, only more so: I didn't need a government *or* a church giving me its blessing. The whole thing felt like a step down to me. From the dawn of time, the one irrefutably good thing about gay men and lesbians was that we didn't force people to sit through our

weddings. Even the most ardent of homophobes had to hand us that. We were the ones who toiled behind the scenes while straight people got married: the photographers and bakers and florists, working like Negro porters settling spoiled passengers into the whites-only section of the train.

"Oh, Christopher," a bride might sigh as her dressmaker zipped her up. "What would I have ever done without you?"

What saved this from being tragic is that they were doing something we wouldn't dream of: guilt-tripping friends and relatives into giving up their weekends so they could sit on hard church pews or folding chairs in August, listening as the couple mewed vows at each other, watching as they're force-fed cake, standing on the sidelines, bored and sweating, as they danced, misty-eyed, to a Foreigner song.

The battle for gay marriage was, in essence, the fight to be as square as straight people, to say things like "My husband tells me that the new Spicy Chipotle Burger they've got at Benigan's is awesome," and "Here it is, Valentine's Day less than a week behind us, and already my wife is flying our Easter flag!"

That said, I was all for the struggle, mainly because it so irritated the fundamentalists. I wanted gay people to get the right to marry, and then I wanted none of us to act on it. I wanted

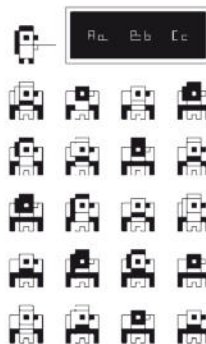


ILLUSTRATION BY CARL DE TORRES

it to be ours to spit on. Instead, much to my disappointment, we seem to be all over it.

I finally got a signal at the post office in the neighboring village. I'd gone to mail a set of keys to a friend and, afterward, I went out front and pulled out my iPad. The touch of a finger and there it was, the headline story on the *Times* site: "SUPREME COURT RULING MAKES SAME-SEX MARRIAGE A RIGHT NATIONWIDE."

I read it, and, probably like every American gay person, I was overcome with emotion. Standing on the sidewalk, dressed in rags with a litter picker pinioned between my legs, I felt my eyes tear up, and as my vision blurred I thought of all the people who had fought against this, and thought, Take that, assholes.

The Supreme Court ruling tells every gay fifteen-year-old living out in the middle of nowhere that he or she is as good as any other dope who wants to get married. To me it was a slightly mixed message, like saying we're all equally entitled to wear Dockers to the Olive Garden. Then I spoke to my accountant, who's as straight as they come, and he couldn't have been more excited. "For tax purposes, you and Hugh really need to act on this," he said.

"But I don't want to," I said. "I don't believe in marriage."

He launched into a little speech, and here's the thing about legally defined couples: they save boatloads of money, especially when it comes to inheriting property. My accountant told me how much we had to gain, and I was, like, "Is there a waiting period? What documents do I need?"

That night, I proposed for the first of what eventually numbered eighteen times. "Listen," I said to Hugh over dinner, "we really need to do this. Otherwise when one of us dies the other will be clobbered with taxes."

"I don't care," he told me. "It's just money."

This is a sentence that does not register on Greek ears. It's *just* a mango-size brain tumor. It's *just* the person I hired to smother you in your sleep. But since when is money *just* money?

"I'm not marrying you," he repeated.

I swore to him that I was not being

romantic about it: "There'll be no rings, no ceremony, no celebration of any kind. We won't tell anyone but the accountant. Think of it as a financial contract, nothing more."

"No."

"God damn it," I said. "You are going to marry me whether you like it or not."

"No, I'm not."

"Oh, yes you are."

After two weeks of this, he slammed his fork on the table, saying, "I'll do anything just to shut you up." This is, I'm pretty sure, the closest I'm likely to get to a yes.

I took another ear of corn. "Fine, then. It's settled."

It wasn't until the following day that the reality set in. I was out on the side of a busy road with my litter picker, collecting the shreds of a paper coffee cup that had been run over by a lawnmower, when I thought of having to tick the box that says "married" instead of "single." I always thought there should have been another option, as for the past twenty-four years I've been happily neither. I would never introduce Hugh as my husband, nor would he refer to me that way, but I can easily imagine other people doing it. They'll be the type who so readily embraced "partner" when it came down the pike, in the mid-nineties. Well-meaning people. The kind who wear bike helmets and use the word "conversation" in that new way that I hate. It occurred to me while standing there, cars whizzing by, that the day I marry is the day I'll get hit and killed, probably by some driver who's texting, or, likelier still, sexting. "He is survived by his husband, Hugh Hamrick," the obituary will read, and before I'm even in my grave I'll be rolling over in it.

That night at dinner, neither of us mentioned the previous evening's conversation. We talked about this and that, our little projects, the lives of our neighbors, and then we retreated to different parts of the house, engaged, I suppose, our whole lives ahead of us. ♦

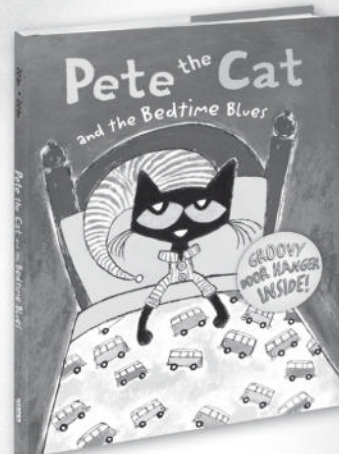
#### HOW'S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT

*From the Cold Spring (N.Y.) Putnam County News and Recorder.*

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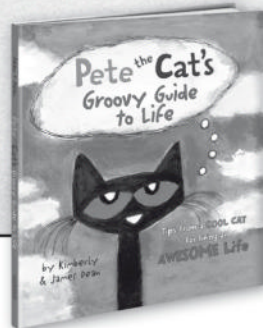
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When Ken Dornstein learned that Pan Am Flight 103 had exploded, he did not realize that his older brother, David, was on the plane. It was December 22, 1988, and Ken, a sophomore at Brown University, was at home, in Philadelphia, on winter break. Over breakfast, he read about the disaster in the *Inquirer*: all two hundred and fifty-nine passengers were killed, along with eleven residents of Lockerbie, Scotland, where flaming debris from the plane fell from the sky. David, who was twenty-five, had been living in Israel and was not scheduled to fly home until later that week, so Ken absorbed the details about the crash with the detached sympathy that one accords a stranger's tragedy. That evening, the airline called. David had changed his plans in order to come home early and surprise his family.

Ken's father, Perry, took the call. A successful physician, Perry was a stern and withdrawn parent; David had been boundlessly expressive, forever writing in a notebook or a journal. Their relationship had often been strained, and now the tensions between them could never be resolved. Ken felt that his father's loss was "unspeakable," and so they didn't speak about it. Ken's sister, Susan, told me that after the funeral Perry rarely mentioned David's name again.

A hundred and eighty-nine of the victims were American, and, as news outlets across the country memorialized the dead, Ken felt that siblings "didn't rank very highly" among surviving relatives. But he had adored David. Their parents had divorced when Ken was a toddler, and their mother, Judy, had struggled with mental illness and addiction. David had become protective of Ken, and had mentored him when he expressed an interest in writing. After the crash, Ken found a box among David's possessions labelled "The Dave Archives"; it was stuffed with journals, stories, poetry, and plays. David had always seen himself as being on the verge of a celebrated literary career. Not long after his death, a local paper ran an obituary suggesting that he had written a novel in Israel. To Ken's surprise, his father was quoted as saying, "He was about to submit the first part for publication." This wasn't true, and Ken was dismayed that his father had "rounded up" David's literary

A REPORTER AT LARGE

# THE AVENGER

*After three decades, has the brother of a victim of the Lockerbie bombing solved the case?*

BY PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE



*Ken Dornstein at his home, in Somerville, Massachusetts, where two rooms are devoted to*





the Lockerbie attack. He was unsatisfied with the official investigation: "How could such a big act of mass murder have no author?"





*"A heart would be great, sure, but what I'd really like is a working human penis."*

achievements. (Perry Dornstein died in 2010, July in 2013.)

Ken arranged the journals chronologically and sorted the manuscripts into color-coded files. The process was eerie: David had sometimes suggested, mischievously, that he was destined to die young, and in the margins of his notebooks Ken discovered winking asides "FOR THE BIOGRAPHERS."

When terrorists strike today, they often claim credit on social media. But Lockerbie, Dornstein told me recently, was a "murder mystery." Flight 103 had left London for New York on December 21st, with David assigned to Row 40 of the economy section. After the plane ascended to thirty thousand feet, an electronic timer activated an explosive device hidden inside a Toshiba radio in the luggage hold, and a lump of Semtex detonated, shearing open the fuselage. The plane broke apart in midair, six miles above the earth. Many of the victims remained alive until the moment they hit the ground. But who built the bomb? Who placed it in the radio? Who put it on the plane?

For years, Dornstein said little to his friends or family about Lockerbie or about his brother. But he began applying the same quiet compulsiveness that he had channelled into the Dave Archives to the

larger riddle of the bombing. He clipped articles, pored over archival footage, and sought out people who had known David. One day, at Penn Station in Manhattan, he spotted Kathryn Geismar, who had dated David for two years. They ended up on the same train, stayed in touch, and eventually fell in love. Initially, Ken hid the romance from his family, fearful that they might consider it an "unholy way to grieve." But the relationship didn't revolve around David; part of what comforted Ken about being with Geismar was that he didn't need to talk with her about his loss. She already knew.

After college, Dornstein moved to Los Angeles and took a job at a detective agency. His colleagues knew nothing of his brother, but he privately took solace from accumulating investigative skills. "I was interested in the trade-craft of how you find people," he recalled. He wondered about the shadowy culprits behind the Lockerbie bombing. "I wasn't a worldly person, I hadn't travelled," he told me. "But I kept thinking, These guys are out there."

When the F.B.I. dispatched agents to Scotland, it was the largest terrorism investigation in U.S. history. Debris from the plane had spread so widely that the crime scene spanned

nearly nine hundred square miles. Initially, suspicion fell on a Palestinian terrorist group that operated out of Syria and was backed by Iran. But when Department of Justice prosecutors announced the results of the U.S. investigation, in November, 1991, they indicted two intelligence operatives from Libya. Prosecutors said that the Libyans had placed the bomb in a Samsonite suitcase and routed it, as unaccompanied baggage, on a plane that went from Malta to Frankfurt. It was then flown to London, where it was transferred onto Pan Am 103.

Throughout the eighties, Libya was a major state sponsor of terrorism. President Ronald Reagan referred to the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi as "the mad dog of the Middle East." In 1986, after Libyan terrorists detonated a bomb at a Berlin disco that was popular with American soldiers, Reagan authorized air strikes on Tripoli and Benghazi. Qaddafi narrowly survived the bombing, which killed dozens, and some observers later speculated that Lockerbie was Qaddafi's deadly riposte to this assassination attempt. But when the indictments were announced Qaddafi denied any Libyan involvement. He refused to turn over the two Libyan defendants until 1998, when he allowed them to stand trial at a special tribunal in the Netherlands. More than two hundred people appeared on the stand, but the testimony of one of the prosecutors' key witnesses proved unreliable, and the prosecution's case against the operatives was largely circumstantial. One of the suspects, Lamin Fhimah, was acquitted. The other, a bespectacled man named Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, was sentenced to life in prison. He was the only suspect to be convicted of the bombing.

Dornstein believed that Megrahi was guilty but had not acted alone. In 2003, Qaddafi released a carefully worded statement allowing that Libya might have been responsible for the blast, and he established a \$2.7-billion fund to compensate the victims. But he never acknowledged authorizing Lockerbie. Brian Murtagh, the lead American prosecutor on the case, admitted to me that the plotters of the attack had eluded his grasp. "Our mandate was to try to indict everybody

we could indict, not everybody we suspected,” he said. Dornstein recalls asking himself, “How could such a big act of mass murder have no author?”

Dornstein married Geismar, a psychologist, in 1997, and they settled in Somerville, Massachusetts. Ken began working for the PBS show “Frontline,” producing documentaries about Afghanistan and Iran. He developed a reputation as a tirelessly analytical researcher. All the while, he kept thinking about Pan Am 103. He travelled to Scotland and spent several weeks in Lockerbie interviewing investigators and walking through the pastures where the plane had gone down. He read the transcript of the Scottish Fatal Accident Inquiry, which exceeded fifteen thousand pages, and he located the patch of grass where David’s body had landed. He wrote about the trip in an article for this magazine, and in 2006 he published a book, “The Boy Who Fell from the Sky.” It is a tribute to David, drawing on his journals and other writings. “David left so many things behind, the beginnings of things,” Richard Suckle, a longtime friend of the family, told me. “In writing the book, it was as if Kenny had found a way that the two of them could collaborate.” The book also explores, with bracing self-awareness, Dornstein’s drive to investigate: “I had found a less painful way to miss my brother, by not missing him at all, just trying to document what happened to his body.”

In 2009, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi was released from a Scottish prison, after serving only eight years. He had developed prostate cancer, and, over strong objections from the Obama Administration, the Scottish government had granted him compassionate release. He returned to Libya, where he was greeted as a hero. Dornstein couldn’t suppress the feeling that Megrahi was literally getting away with murder.

He suspected that other perpetrators remained at large in Libya. The lead Scottish investigator on the case, Stuart Henderson, gave him a list of eight “unindicted co-conspirators” who had never been captured. He told Dornstein that if he could get to Libya it might be possible to track down the men who were responsible. But Qaddafi was still running a police state, and it

was too risky for Dornstein to go there and ask questions about Lockerbie.

Then, in 2011, revolution broke out. That summer, as rebels gained territory, Dornstein told Geismar that he wanted to make a film in which he travelled to Libya and confronted culprits who were still alive. Dornstein was not a habitual risk-taker: though he had worked with many war reporters, he didn’t frequent conflict zones himself. He and Geismar had two children, and he respected her right to object. But in his marriage, he told me, there is something called “the Lockerbie dispensation.”

“As a wife, I didn’t want him to go,” Geismar told me. “But as a friend I knew he needed to.”

One day last November, I met Dornstein at his house, on a leafy street in Somerville. At forty-six, with a slight build and a boyish flush in his cheeks, he looks remarkably like the older brother whose image was trapped in time at twenty-five. Dornstein ushered me up to the third floor, where two cramped rooms were devoted to Lockerbie. In one room, shelves were lined with books about espionage, aviation, terrorism, and the Middle East. Jumbo binders housed decades of research. In the other room, Dornstein had papered the walls with mug shots of Libyan suspects. Between the two rooms was a large map of Lockerbie, with hundreds of colored pushpins indicating where the bodies had fallen. He showed me a cluster where first-class passengers landed, and another where most economy passengers were found. Like the coroner in a police procedural, Dornstein derives such clinical satisfaction from his work that he can narrate the grisliest findings with cheerful detachment. Motioning at a scattering of pushpins some distance from the rest, he said, “They were the youngest, smallest children. If you look at the physics of it, they were carried by the wind.”

Before setting off for Libya, Dornstein sat his children down for dinner. They had always known that they had an uncle who died, but they were un-

aware of the precise circumstances of his death. Dornstein told them, and explained that, even though Libya was in tumult, he wanted to make a documentary there. He filmed the exchange. “Would you do it, even if it meant leaving your kids who you love so much and your wife and your life together?” he asked.

His son Sam, who was eleven at the time, said, “To find the culprit? It would mean a lot to me.” When I watched the scene, later, it seemed staged, but Dornstein insisted that it wasn’t. “It’s the producer in me,” he said. “I wanted their natural reactions.”

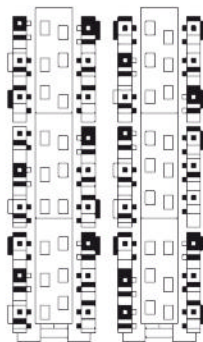
Dornstein enlisted Tim Gucza, an Australian cameraman with experience in conflict zones. By this point, Dornstein had left his job at “Frontline,” and was financing the film himself. This posed a challenge: he needed to pay for everything in cash, because Libya lacked functioning banks, and the wartime rates at the Tripoli Radisson were exorbitant. But Dornstein had funds at his disposal—he could draw on the money that his family had received from the Lockerbie fund set up by Qaddafi. “Some people in Libya would try to shut down discussion about Lockerbie by saying, essentially, ‘We paid the money—the file is closed,’” Dornstein said. Some relatives of Lockerbie

victims refer to the payment as blood money. “The money is supposed to be the end of it for them. But for me the money was the beginning, because it enabled me to try to get what I really wanted—the story.”

When I asked Gucza what he thought of Dornstein’s conviction that he could track down terrorists in Libya, he replied, with a chuckle, “I figured he was either completely insane or pretty much right.”

In September, 2011, Dornstein flew to Tunisia and paid a man to drive through the night and escort him across the Libyan border. Disconcertingly, the driver pulled one beer after another from a cooler that he kept behind the front seat. But by the morning they had arrived safely in Tripoli.

Dornstein and Gucza needed a local





fixer, and they connected with Suliman Ali Zway, a young man from Benghazi who had worked as a stringer for the *Times* and other publications. Conditions in Libya were unstable—NATO warplanes had been bombing regime strongholds, and Qaddafi was on the run—and there had been talk of delaying the trip. But in Grucza's experience this was the moment to strike. "You go in while it's chaotic," he told me. Ali Zway guided Dornstein and Grucza into bombed-out villas and abandoned intelligence bunkers, where they searched for clues about Lockerbie. "At first, I thought they were just another TV crew coming to do a quick story," Ali Zway told me. "I didn't understand the obsession until later."

Over the course of three trips to Libya, Dornstein sought out the eight men on his list. One by one, he struck them off. Abdullah Senussi, Qaddafi's chief of intelligence and one of the likely architects of the bombing, had fled Tripoli and disappeared; Dornstein visited his villa and found a crater in the center of it, where a NATO missile had struck. Said Rashid—a cousin of Megrahi, the convicted terrorist—had remained a central figure in the regime, but when revolution broke out he was shot, in an execution

that many suspect Qaddafi had ordered. In October, 2011, Qaddafi himself was discovered by rebels and murdered. At the time, he was hiding out with Ezza-din Hinshiri, who was also on Dornstein's list. The rebels shot Hinshiri, too.

At one point, Dornstein visited Libyan state television and found a skeleton crew still working there. In the archives, he discovered footage that had been recorded when Megrahi returned to Libya from Scotland: Megrahi slowly descends the stairs from the airplane, waving to a crowd that had turned out to greet him. He boarded the plane in Scotland hunched over, his face wrapped in a white scarf, looking like an invalid. But he disembarked in a double-breasted suit with a pink tie and a pocket square.

Megrahi was expected to die soon after he was released, but he was still alive in 2011, ensconced with his family in a large villa in Tripoli. Dornstein asked several times to meet Megrahi, but was rebuffed. On one occasion, he and Grucza drove to the villa and were turned away at the front gate. When Dornstein climbed back into their van, he slammed his fist into the seat in front of him. Grucza recalls, "I've never seen Ken so upset—really physically angry."

Then, that December, an English-

man named Jim Swire came to Tripoli. Swire is perhaps the most famous member of the Lockerbie bereaved. His daughter, Flora, was killed, and he was so devastated that he abandoned his medical practice and devoted himself to understanding how the bombing happened. Swire helped persuade Qaddafi to allow Megrahi and Fhimah to be tried in the Netherlands, and Swire attended nearly every day of the trial. But as he watched the evidence unfold he came to believe that Libya had not actually been responsible for the bombing—and that both defendants were innocent. After Megrahi was imprisoned in Scotland, he and Swire developed an unlikely friendship.

Though Dornstein, like most of the American officials who investigated the case, believed in Megrahi's guilt, he recognized a kinship in Swire's profound engagement with the intricacies of the tragedy. Swire, he learned, had come to Libya in order to pay a final visit to Megrahi, whose condition was worsening. Swire, a slim man in his late seventies, with a gently emphatic manner, allowed him to come along for the visit. Dornstein, adopting the role of open-minded investigator, asked Swire questions and remained vague about his own conclusions. "He was used to being chronicled," Dornstein said. "And I naturally like to keep myself out of things."

Cameras would not be welcome in Megrahi's villa—a CNN reporter had recently climbed the front wall. But Dornstein knew that any confrontation with Megrahi would be an important moment in his film. He was haunted by a detail in "Manhunt," a book by Peter Bergen about the pursuit of Osama bin Laden. A Pakistani journalist, Hamid Mir, had secured an interview with bin Laden in the wake of September 11th. After instructing Mir to turn off his tape recorder, bin Laden had acknowledged ordering the attack. But when Mir turned his recorder back on bin Laden said, "I'm not responsible." What if Megrahi whispered a confession on his deathbed and Dornstein had no record of it? Before heading to the villa, he concealed a camera lens in a custom-made button on the front of a black shirt. The camera was affixed to his chest with surgical tape



*"Your posture is better, but the whole office calls you Professor Bouncy Jerk. F.Y.I."*

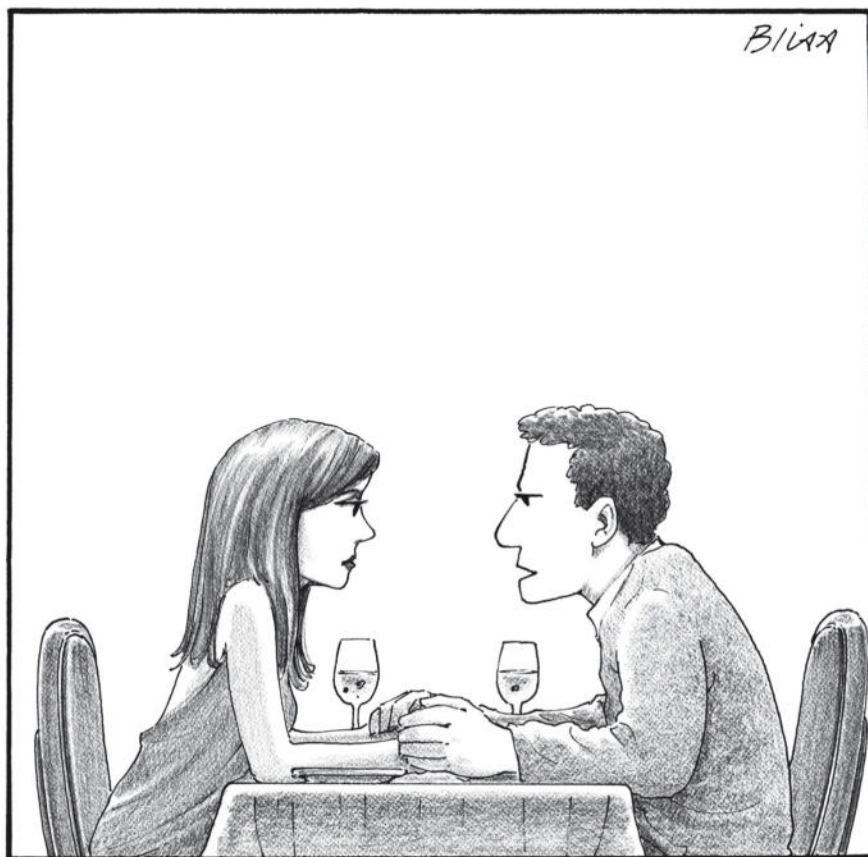
and connected by a thin wire to a receiver that was hidden in his boot.

Megrahi's son, Khaled, a dark-eyed young man, greeted Dornstein and Swire at the front entrance and escorted them into an expansive compound with a swimming pool. But when they reached the main house Khaled told Dornstein, "Only one," and made him wait on the porch while Swire went in to see Megrahi. Flustered, Dornstein asked to use the bathroom. He stepped inside and looked at himself in the mirror. Megrahi was in the next room. Dornstein could have barged in, but he didn't.

When I asked Geismar why she thought that her husband had not forced a confrontation with Megrahi, she said, "Ken has too much respect for Swire to do that." She went on, "He may disagree with Swire's conviction that Megrahi is innocent, but he respects the process that Swire had to go through to get to that conclusion, and he wasn't going to interfere with that moment." Dornstein was convinced that Jim Swire had devoted his life to a misguided effort to exonerate the man who killed his daughter. There was tragedy in that, but for Swire there was also meaning—and sustenance similar to what Dornstein had derived from his own investigations. Later, when Dornstein inquired about the meeting, Swire told him that Megrahi, as a dying wish, had asked Swire to keep fighting to clear his name. Swire added, "There were tears on both sides."

**B**adri Hassan, a close friend of Megrahi's, was another name on Dornstein's list. He, too, died—of a heart attack—before Dornstein could confront him. But Dornstein tracked down his widow, Suad, a middle-aged woman with nervous eyes and long black hair. Over several meetings at her family home, she told Dornstein of her longstanding suspicion that her husband had been involved in Lockerbie. She had asked him about it repeatedly; he had never confessed. "But I'm absolutely sure of it," she said. Dornstein revealed that his brother had been on the plane, and she was clearly moved. "Badri left behind such suffering," she murmured.

Unlike the others on Dornstein's list, who were spies or government offi-



*"Candice, your eyes are like two crystal-blue pools of habitual judgment."*

• •

cials, Hassan had been a civilian, working for Libyan Airlines. Suad's brother, Yaseen el-Kanuni, told Dornstein that for more than a year prior to the bombing Hassan and Megrahi had rented an office together in Switzerland. "You would get a lot of information out of a certain Swiss person," he said. "Mr. Bollier. He's located in Zurich."

After Flight 103 went down, hundreds of Scottish police constables scoured the countryside, inch by inch, collecting evidence. Miles outside Lockerbie, a fragment of the circuit board from the bomb's timing device was discovered. This plastic shard, which was smaller than a fingernail, was embedded in a shirt collar, and investigators deduced that the shirt had been wrapped around the radio containing the device. They traced the label on the shirt to a shop in Malta, and this clue led them to suspect Megrahi, who had been in Malta the day before the blast. The owner of the shop subsequently recalled Megrahi's buying the shirt.

The F.B.I. sent photographs of the circuit-board fragment to the C.I.A., which often examines the components of explosive devices linked to radical groups. A technical analyst at the agency thought that the Lockerbie timer looked familiar. In Togo in 1986, after an attempted coup that Libya was accused of backing, authorities discovered an arms cache that included two custom-made timing devices. In early 1988, two Libyan operatives were stopped at an airport in Senegal with a time bomb. All these timers appeared to have been made by the same hand. On the circuit board of one of the timers, C.I.A. investigators discovered a tiny brand name that had been partially scratched out: MEBO.

MEBO is a boutique electronics company based in Zurich and operated by a man named Edwin Bollier. When F.B.I. officials approached Bollier, they found him to be remarkably cooperative. He flew to Quantico, Virginia, in February, 1991, and was debriefed by





*On a map affixed to a wall in Dornstein's home, clusters of pushpins indicate locations where some of the victims fell to earth.*

U.S. officials for five days. They showed him the fragment found in Lockerbie, and he identified it as part of a set of timers that he had sold to Libya several years earlier. When I visited Dornstein in Somerville, he showed me a declassified copy of the original F.B.I. report; it revealed, he said, that Bollier “had even *gone to Libya*” to help the regime develop bomb timers. In Libya, Bollier met a colonel who instructed him on the kind of timers that the regime required, explaining that the timers were intended for bombs. The colonel, Bollier told investigators, was “very dark-skinned.”

Bollier also informed the agents that, two nights before the Lockerbie crash, he visited the office of Megrahi—the convicted terrorist—in Tripoli, and saw several Libyan “thugs” huddled in discussion. According to the F.B.I. account, Bollier believed that this meeting “could have been part of the preparations for the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing.” Bollier then made it clear that he would be happy to serve as a witness in court, adding that he hoped that the U.S. could pay him for

his efforts. He also wondered if American intelligence agencies might have some use for his technical expertise. “Bollier had this whole notion that he was going to be the new Q for the C.I.A.,” Dornstein said. But by the time of the trial in the Netherlands, a decade later, Bollier had realized that the U.S. government had no intention of partnering with him—and he changed his story. On the stand, he recanted his original statements to the F.B.I., insisting that the fragment found outside Lockerbie had been doctored to frame him. “The problem was that Bollier was treated like a witness,” Dornstein said. “He should have been treated like a suspect.”

In the fall of 2012, Dornstein flew to Zurich. Bollier still works out of the same building where he made the timer that was used in Lockerbie. Dornstein, relying on his charm, persuaded him to spend a few days talking on camera. But Bollier, a beady-eyed man in his seventies, was not an easy interview. He met any suggestion of a disparity between his story and the accepted facts with a cryptic smile, saying, “It’s curious.”

Bollier acknowledged selling timers and other electronic equipment to the Qaddafi regime, telling Dornstein that his dealings with the Libyans made him “very, very rich.” But he denied knowing that the timers were used in terrorist attacks. It was no crime to deal with Libya, he insisted: “Switzerland is neutral and I’m neutral in this thing.” He admitted knowing Megrahi and Badri Hassan, and pointed to an office down the hall, which they had rented from MEBO before the Lockerbie bombing. But when Dornstein asked if he believed that Megrahi had been involved in the bombing Bollier shook his head dismissively. Megrahi was a “tip-top” man, he said.

Bollier acknowledged that at one point in Libya he had been taken to the desert, where Qaddafi’s military was testing bombs and timers. “Can you see why it’s suspicious?” Dornstein said. “It looks like you are helping the Libyans make the bomb that blew up Flight 103.”

Bollier smiled. “I have nothing to do with Pan Am,” he said.

Dornstein then pressed Bollier about his claim to the F.B.I. that he’d met a





*David Dornstein was twenty-five when he died. Scottish investigators recovered his personal effects from the crash site.*

colonel in Libya with “very dark skin.” This sounded like a man who had been a recurring, if mysterious, figure in Dornstein’s research. Dornstein had discovered a declassified C.I.A. cable that described a Libyan technical expert named Abu Agila Mas’ud who had travelled with Megrahi to Malta in December, 1988. According to the cable, which was based on an interview with an informant, Mas’ud was “a tall black Libyan male who is approximately 40 to 45 years of age.” Was this the same man Bollier had encountered? Dornstein, looking at evidence from the Lockerbie trial, found Maltese immigration records that included Mas’ud’s Libyan passport number: 835004. If this was the technical expert, perhaps he had made the Lockerbie bomb.

“I remember there was a black colonel,” Bollier told Dornstein. “Dark skin, yes.” In his recollection, however, the man was short.

“Do you remember his name?” Dornstein asked. Bollier didn’t. “Was the dark-skinned man called Abu Agila Mas’ud?”

“No,” Bollier replied. (In an e-mail, Bollier told me that any suggestion that

he was linked to the destruction of Pan Am 103 is a “despicable accusation” and a “fictional idea.” His e-mail address, which I discovered on his Web site, is Mr.Lockerbie@gmail.com.)

Everywhere Dornstein went in Libya, he asked people if they knew of Mas’ud. Nobody said yes. “We kept hitting brick walls,” Ali Zway recalled. “We weren’t even sure he existed.” The name sounded like it could be a nom de guerre or an alias, Tim Grucza said, adding, “He seemed like a ghost.” As it happened, Scottish investigators had also come across the name. But in 1999, when some of them were permitted to enter Libya and question government ministers, the officials refused to confirm or deny that Mas’ud existed.

When a bomb ripped through the La Belle discothèque in Berlin on April 5, 1986, the walls caved in and the dance floor collapsed into the basement. Three people were killed and two hundred and twenty-nine were injured; two American servicemen died, and more than fifty were wounded. Afterward, the National Se-

curity Agency intercepted communications indicating that the attack had been carried out by spies operating out of the Libyan Embassy in East Berlin.

A few years later, after Germany reunited, a Berlin prosecutor named Detlev Mehlis accessed files revealing that the Stasi had been tracking the La Belle terrorists before and after the attacks. Mehlis identified one of the key perpetrators: Musbah Eter, a baby-faced Libyan operative who had been posted in East Berlin. But Eter had fled the country. Then, one day in 1996, Eter walked into the German Embassy in Malta and turned himself in. Before leaving Berlin, he had fallen in love with a German woman and fathered a daughter, and now he was looking for a way back to Germany, even if it meant serving time in prison. Mehlis flew to Malta to debrief Eter. They met for beers at a Holiday Inn, and Eter gave a full confession. In 2001, he was convicted of the La Belle bombing, along with three associates.

After Dornstein’s pursuit of perpetrators in Libya came up empty, he



widened his purview to look at the broader community of Libyan terrorists who had been operating during the eighties. He decided to consult the Stasi files about the La Belle bombing. At the spy agency's former headquarters, in an imposing edifice in East Berlin, he found that intelligence reports were archived on hundreds of thousands of little cards. Examining the surveillance files for the La Belle disco bombers, Dornstein discovered, along with the names of Eter and his co-conspirators, several references to Abu Agila Mas'ud—the bomb technician. He had apparently arrived in Berlin before the attack, and after the blast he had stayed in Room 526 of Berlin's Metropol Hotel. Mas'ud employed code names and aliases, the files noted. But the Stasi knew the number of his Libyan passport: 835004. It was a perfect match for the number that Dornstein had found in the Maltese immigration records.

"When the Americans investigated Lockerbie, they had suspects, but they didn't know the roles everyone played," Dornstein said. "The Stasi knew who was who. They knew that Mas'ud showed up in Berlin right before La Belle." Dornstein tracked down Mehliis, the German prosecutor, who told him that Musbah Eter, the La Belle terrorist, had spoken about Mas'ud when he confessed at the Holiday Inn in Malta. According to Eter, Mas'ud had brought the La Belle bomb to the Libyan Embassy in East Berlin and instructed him on how to arm it. Mehliis showed Dornstein a piece of stationery from the Holiday Inn, upon which Eter had written "ABUGELA" alongside the German word "*Neger*" ("Negro").

Dornstein learned that Eter had been released from a German prison and had stayed in Berlin, where he ran a restaurant. Eter is a diminutive man in his fifties, with a streak of white in his black hair and a fondness for ascots. When Dornstein met him, in late 2012, he was working with the new rebel government in Libya to find medical care in Germany for veterans of the revolution. Dornstein did not initially make

it clear to Eter that he was the brother of a Lockerbie victim or that he was making a film about the attack. Instead, he asked genial questions about the work that Eter was doing for Libyan war veterans. Eter introduced Dornstein to his daughter, who was now in her twenties and did not appear to know about her father's past. But Eter made little effort to keep secrets from Dornstein. At one point, he took the camera crew on a walking tour of the East Berlin neighborhood where he used to live, and pointed out the old Libyan Embassy. It now houses offices and a bike shop. Eter flagged down a German man who worked in the building, and told him that he had once worked in the old Embassy.

"I heard a rumor that the La Belle disco bombing was carried out from this building," the man said, brightly.

"It's no rumor! It was organized in this building!" Eter said, even more brightly. With the man's help, he gained access to the complex and climbed to the second floor. He then muttered something in Arabic, which Dornstein later had translated: "What we did was wrong, and I admit it. If I could go back in time, I wouldn't have done it."

For Dornstein, meeting Eter was revelatory. "I had been trying to construct the world of Libyan intelligence in the nineteen-eighties from spare parts, and

now suddenly here was this guy who had actually lived it," he said. "It was as if you'd read all the Harry Potter books, then you got to sit down with a guy who actually went to Hogwarts."

Dornstein knew that he had to be careful. His research suggested that Eter may have worked as an assassin during his early years

in Berlin. Many young functionaries in the Qaddafi regime were sent to Europe with instructions to execute Libyan dissidents in exile. (Qaddafi referred to these dissidents as "stray dogs.") The more Dornstein asked Eter about his past, the more Eter came to suspect that the film might not be focussed on his philanthropic efforts. One night in December, Eter asked Dorn-

stein to dinner. The camera crew was not invited. Dornstein, hoping that Eter would disclose something important, decided to wear his hidden camera. He expected to meet at a restaurant in central Berlin, and was surprised when Eter gave him the address of a small apartment on the outskirts of the city. Dornstein felt nervous, but relaxed a bit when he arrived and found that Eter had arranged for a generous spread of Middle Eastern food accompanied by fresh pita bread dusted with flour. They were joined by a German-language translator, and while Dornstein launched into questions about Eter's life and legal status, Eter ate silently, drinking red wine and watching Dornstein with a wary eye. Eventually, he explained his discomfort: he had begun to doubt that Dornstein was just a filmmaker. "Are you F.B.I.?" he asked. "C.I.A.?"

It was not the first time that Dornstein had been accused of being a spy—it was a routine assumption on his visits to Tripoli—but he broke out in a cold sweat. Underneath his shirt, he felt the surgical tape on his chest start slipping. Whenever this happened, the hidden camera's lens tilted toward the ceiling, ruining the shot, and Dornstein had developed a habit of smoothing the front of his shirt with his palms to put the camera back in place. He did this, and explained that he was not a spy.

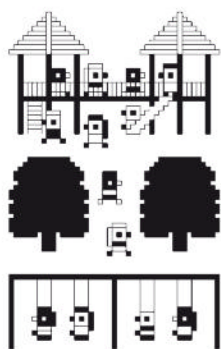
Eter seemed to settle down, and Dornstein helped himself to a piece of pita bread and smoothed his shirt again. After a while, he glanced down and discovered, to his horror, that each time he pressed his palms against his black shirt he was smearing flour from the pita bread in a ring around the hidden camera. It looked like a big white target.

"Can I use the bathroom?" he said.

"Are you recording this?" Eter demanded.

"No," Ken said. "Can I use the bathroom?"

Eter indicated a door just off the room where they were eating. Dornstein wanted to get rid of the camera, but unwiring himself and pulling the receiver out of his boot would take some effort, and the bathroom door was made of frosted glass. Besides,



where could he ditch the camera? The bathroom had no window to throw it out of. He composed himself, dusted off his shirt, and rejoined Eter and the translator. “I still feel sick talking about it,” he told me. Eter did not challenge him again that night. But Dornstein feels bad about having made the clandestine recording. “He had been honorable in his dealings with me,” he said. He has not used the hidden camera since.

The topic that Dornstein was most determined to discuss with Eter was Abu Agila Mas’ud. In one of their discussions, Eter acknowledged having known the bomb expert.

“Is he still alive?” Dornstein asked. Eter said that he was.



*“Roy, if you can hear me, the Mets are twenty games over .500 and they have a good shot at clinching the N.L. East.”*

When Dornstein was organizing the Dave Archives, he made an upsetting discovery. After he annotated the journals, he sought out friends whom David had mentioned, to ask them about his brother. One of them recalled, as if Ken had always known, that David had been sexually abused as a child. “David told me everything,” Ken said to me. “But he didn’t tell me this.” The perpetrator was the older brother of one of David’s childhood friends, and as Ken dug into this secret episode he learned that years later David had confronted the man. David didn’t hit him or call the police. But he wanted to face the abuser, who was now married with children of his own. “He wanted to make the guy uncomfortable in front of his family,” Ken told me. “He delivered the message, the vengeance message: ‘I know what you did.’”

At Brown, Ken had majored in philosophy and had read Robert Nozick on the difference between retribution and revenge. He was especially drawn, he told me, to “the idea that there’s an odd bond between the victim and the perpetrator. They’re locked in a relationship, and the role of the avenger is to deliver a message. ‘I know who you are. I know what you did.’”

As he tried to sort through his sense of irresolution about his brother’s death, he kept returning to Nozick’s formulation. When we talked in his study in Somerville, Dornstein quoted Elie Wiesel: “Sometimes it happens that we travel for a long time with-

out knowing that we have made the long journey solely to pronounce a certain word, a certain phrase, in a certain place. The meeting of the place and the word is a rare accomplishment.” It might seem abstract and philosophical, Dornstein said, but this is the way he came to understand his role as avenger. He surveyed books about Jews tracking down Nazis, and Israelis hunting the terrorists who attacked the 1972 Munich Olympics. His reckoning, he told me, would come not in an act of retribution but in the delivery of a message: “Twenty-five years ago, on a day of your choosing, you put a bomb in an airplane, and the course of my life changed. Now, on a day of my choosing, I will come to your home and I will knock on your door and say, ‘I was on the other side of that act.’”

When Dornstein and I started having conversations about his film, last fall, his obsessions had coalesced around Abu Agila Mas’ud. If Eter was correct that Mas’ud was still alive, Dornstein wanted to track him down. Others might disagree with his conclusions: Swire, for instance, still believes that Megrahi, who died in 2012, was innocent, and he thinks that the bomb originated not

in Malta but in London. (“I welcome Ken’s terrific efforts to get to the truth,” Swire told me, adding that he has never ruled out the possibility that Qaddafi and his regime were involved.) The prosecution made various missteps during Megrahi’s trial, such as putting unreliable witnesses on the stand, some of whom were paid by the U.S. government. But Dornstein told me, “That doesn’t make Megrahi innocent.” Whenever there is a calamitous terrorist attack, alternative theories take shape in the gaps in evidence. During the nineteen-eighties, the world of Middle Eastern terrorism was filled with conspiracies, so there are plausible scenarios in which the Palestinians or the Syrians or the Iranians were involved with the Libyans in planning Lockerbie. Radical groups sometimes collaborated, trading hardware and expertise. “Endless names and intrigue,” Dornstein told me. “You can’t even hold it in your head.”

Some might be tempted to dismiss Dornstein as a kook. Having a personal connection to a tragedy is a special qualification—and a kind of mandate—but emotional investment can also be blinding. When someone spends twenty-five years investigating an





*"Hey, it's Christmas somewhere."*

incident, his objectivity can be imperilled. Ken's sister, Susan, told me that she has never felt any desire to know the details of the Lockerbie attack or the identities of the men who carried it out. "I could care less if you find the guy who did it," she said. "The killers themselves, they have zero meaning to me. It wasn't directed at David. It was a random attack of violence. They weren't specifically targeting him." She stressed that she had always been supportive of Ken's investigations, but added, "I don't know if it's healthy anymore. It would be sad for Ken to give David up, because then who else is keeping him alive? If you close the book, he's gone. But after twenty-five years we have families. We have people who rely on us. We need to move on."

At one point, Dornstein told me, he asked Swire if he could imagine a time when the quest for the truth was behind him. David has now been dead for longer than he was alive, and Dornstein wondered if he might still be seeking answers when he was Swire's age. Part of him wanted Swire to discourage him from such a future.

Swire acknowledged that his campaign had always been "a way of deal-

ing with the loss of a dearly loved daughter." But he said that he had no plans to stop. "I suppose you have to parse the harm it's doing to you, and to those who love you, against the good that it might produce in the end if you crack it," he said.

One day this spring, Dornstein e-mailed me a video clip. It was the footage from Libyan state television of Megrahi's triumphant homecoming in 2009. I played the clip, and he narrated over the phone. As onlookers strained to touch Megrahi's sleeve, the first person up the stairs to greet him was Said Rashid, one of the alleged Lockerbie plotters. After disembarking, Megrahi climbed into a waiting S.U.V., where he was embraced by the man behind the wheel—Abdullah Senussi, Qaddafi's intelligence chief and one of the alleged masterminds of the plot. Megrahi had always maintained that he had no involvement in the bombing of Flight 103, but here he was, embracing some of the other prime suspects. "It's like a reunion," Dornstein exclaimed. "A belated victory party for the Lockerbie plotters."

He had me play the footage a second time, and after Megrahi's embrace

with Senussi, Dornstein said, "O.K., now pause it." I immediately noticed something. Less than a second passes between the embrace with Senussi and the moment the car drives away, but in that instant a third man, who was previously obscured in the shadows of the back seat, leans forward, clasps Megrahi's hand, and kisses him on the cheek. The video captures him for only an instant. He wears a white suit, his head is virtually bald, and his skin is very dark.

Dornstein decided to send the video to Eter's lawyer, in the hope that Eter would look at it. In Berlin, Dornstein had witnessed Eter's affection for his Westernized daughter, and wondered if Eter might be worried about his legacy, trying to atone for the evil he had done. Eter also had a more self-interested motivation: he was attempting to secure permanent immigration status in Germany. If Eter could furnish valuable information, it might help his cause.

The lawyer agreed to show Eter the video and ask him if the man in the back seat of the S.U.V. was Abu Agila Mas'ud. Several days later, the answer came back: It was difficult to tell. The lighting wasn't great. But Eter was eighty per cent sure that it was.

Dornstein now knew Mas'ud's name, his passport number, and what he looked like. With a video image of his face, there might be a real possibility of finding him. But what then? Libya had slipped into civil war, and was much more dangerous than it had been on Dornstein's earlier trips. The rebels had rounded up Qaddafi loyalists and were holding show trials in Misrata and Tripoli. Former senior officials had been photographed in prison cells, in blue uniforms, looking sullen. Abdullah Senussi, the former intelligence chief, had fled to Mauritania, but Libya secured his return. After the murder of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens, in Benghazi, in September, 2012, Libya was considered extremely dangerous for Americans.

Setting up a private meeting with Mas'ud would be very difficult. But Dornstein had noticed that, on at least two recent occasions, the U.S. had sent covert military snatch teams into Libya

to pick up suspects and remove them from the country. In 2014, the *Washington Post* published video of an early-morning raid in which U.S. special-operations forces suddenly materialized on the streets of Tripoli, surrounded the car of Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai—who was wanted in connection with the 1998 bombings of U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania—and whisked him away in a white van. The abduction took less than sixty seconds, and several weeks later al-Ruqai was arraigned in a federal court in Manhattan. (He died, reportedly of liver cancer, before he could stand trial.) “Maybe they could do one of these raids and get Mas’ud,” Dornstein suggested to me.

Technically, the case had never been closed in the U.S., but it wasn’t clear if anyone was actively pursuing it. Dornstein presented his findings to Richard Marquise, a retired F.B.I. agent who was one of the lead investigators on the Lockerbie case. Marquise was impressed. “He showed me a bunch of stuff I’d never seen,” he told me. “Declassified C.I.A. documents! I knew the information in them, but I’d never seen these documents.” Marquise told me that investigators had heard stories about Mas’ud. “We always suspected that he was the guy that armed the bomb,” he said. “But we could never get any more information on him. The Scottish police couldn’t get the Libyans to admit that he existed, and we weren’t sure about the name. We thought maybe it was a pseudonym.” After Dornstein laid out his evidence, Marquise called the F.B.I. “I’ve got some information you should be aware of,” he said. “Maybe we’ll get some more indictments.”

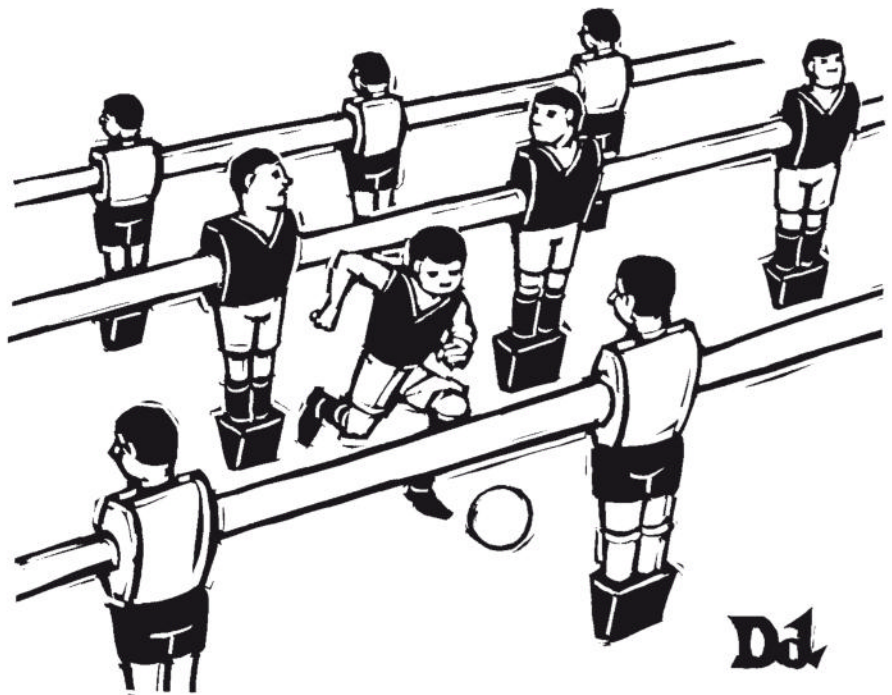
Shortly after Marquise relayed Dornstein’s findings to the bureau, Musbah Eter was summoned to a meeting at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. When I spoke with Dornstein in June, he seemed cautiously optimistic, explaining that the Justice Department had interviewed Eter in Germany and appeared to be pursuing this new lead in the case. “I think the U.S. is pushing,” Dornstein said. Eter had told U.S. officials that Mas’ud and Megrahi were involved in Lockerbie, and that he had heard Mas’ud speak

of travelling to Malta to prepare the attack. Even if the Obama Administration did not want to send a special-ops team into Libya to capture Mas’ud, Eter had raised the possibility that he could try to lure him out of the country. This was common in international law enforcement: when a suspect is hiding out in a nation where he enjoys protection, a skillful ruse can trick him into travelling to a country where he can be arrested. It might be a risky proposition for Eter. But he seemed willing to entertain any plan that would help secure his immigration status. He would also be helping the Germans: Mas’ud was wanted in connection with the La Belle disco bombing as well as with Lockerbie.

As the U.S. government was dealing with Eter, Dornstein was turning his footage into a film. He had a title—“My Brother’s Bomber”—but he didn’t yet have an ending. “Frontline” wanted to air the documentary, in three parts, in the fall, and this deadline exposed the tension between Dornstein’s roles as grieving brother and documentary filmmaker. He had always been a storyteller: as an adolescent, before David’s death, he had wanted to be a comedy writer, and he had never shied away from showmanship.

In “The Boy Who Fell from the Sky,” he withholds, until page 73, the fact that the woman he eventually married had first dated his brother. (“An admission: I am leaving out important parts of this story,” he writes.) His friend Richard Suckle, who is now a producer in Hollywood, assured me that, though the impetus for Dornstein’s film may have been therapeutic, at a certain point his narrative instincts would take over. “I think it goes beyond emotional catharsis,” Suckle said. “Nobody ever got to the bottom of it, all the thousands of people who worked on the investigation. It’s about being the guy that got to the finish line when nobody else did.”

Dornstein knew that if he revealed his discovery about Mas’ud in the film Mas’ud would likely go into hiding, short-circuiting any government effort to capture him. In July, Dornstein said to me, “In terms of the timing, the question is: At what point do I want to finish my film and get what I came for? I have to ask myself, ‘Tell me again what you are in this for.’ How much do I care about actually getting him, or would I be satisfied with something short of that? Because when I publish, it’s over. I’m in an odd position, because I initiated what has now become an official process—and I



**Dd**

*“You can always tell which guys aren’t trapped in long-term contracts.”*



could also be the person to sabotage it.”

When I asked Dornstein if it was important to him that Mas’ud face justice, he said that it was not his paramount concern. He reminded me of Nozick’s concept of revenge. “Do I think he would have anything interesting to tell me?” Dornstein said. “I don’t. I don’t even think he has interesting reasons for doing what he did.” The crucial thing was to deliver a message. “I’ve been thinking about this person for so long,” he said. “And for so long it seemed as though he might not exist at all. It would be enough for me to say his name and have him turn his head. Me proving he exists is the checkmate.”

Dornstein had only Eter’s word that Mas’ud was still alive, and he wanted what hostage negotiators call “proof of life.” Then, one day last summer, Eter’s lawyer sent Dornstein a grainy digital photograph of several men—one of whom, in the background, had very dark skin. All the men, Dornstein noticed, were wearing blue uniforms.

On his computer, Dornstein began searching for photographs from the recent show trials in Libya. Pulling up a series of shots from Getty Images, he found a higher-resolution version of the scene depicted in the grainy photograph. In the foreground was the lined and scowling face of Abdullah Senussi, the former intelligence chief. Over his shoulder, against the wall, was a bald man with very dark skin. To Dornstein, he looked a lot like the man who had greeted Megrahi in the S.U.V. Upon making the discovery, Dornstein called me, very excited. As

his investigation progressed, he had taken to using an encrypted cell-phone program, and he insisted that we switch to a secure line before he relayed the news. “I found it kind of incredible,” he said. “Eter said it’s confirmed that the guy is alive, but there was never any sense that he was in *jail*.” Dornstein sent one of the high-resolution images back to Berlin. Not long afterward, the lawyer relayed Eter’s response: “100%. It’s him.”

This was a huge development in Dornstein’s quest, but he fretted that the identification was still less than airtight. He knew that Eter, given his immigration issues, was not an entirely disinterested witness. (Eter, reached in Berlin, declined to answer questions for this article.) After some further study, Dornstein found a researcher at Human Rights Watch, Hanan Salah, who was based in Nairobi and had been closely monitoring the trials in Libya. He reached her on Skype, and they spoke for an hour about the political situation in Libya and the general tenor of the trials. Then Dornstein told her that he was trying to confirm the identity of a defendant he had seen in a photograph.

“Do you want to tell me the name?” she said.

“Yes,” Dornstein said, and he typed the name Abu Agila Mas’ud.

For a moment, Salah was silent while she consulted the charge sheet. Then she said, “There’s no one with that name.”

“Do you feel you have the full list?” Dornstein stammered.

“Yeah,” Salah said, her voice conveying that she knew this was not the answer he wanted to hear.

“O.K., well, that’s very helpful,” Dornstein said. “Because maybe this person who is telling me this . . . isn’t right. For whatever reason—”

“Oh, wait,” she interrupted. “Wait, wait, wait. I have a name. It’s just written slightly differently. . . . Abuajila Mas’ud.”

Dornstein was elated. A woman with no connection to the Lockerbie story had identified the dark-skinned man on trial in Libya as the same person who appeared in the C.I.A. files, the Stasi files, and the Maltese immigration records. For years, Mas’ud had been a ghost, a passport number. Now there was a charge sheet and a high-resolution photograph.

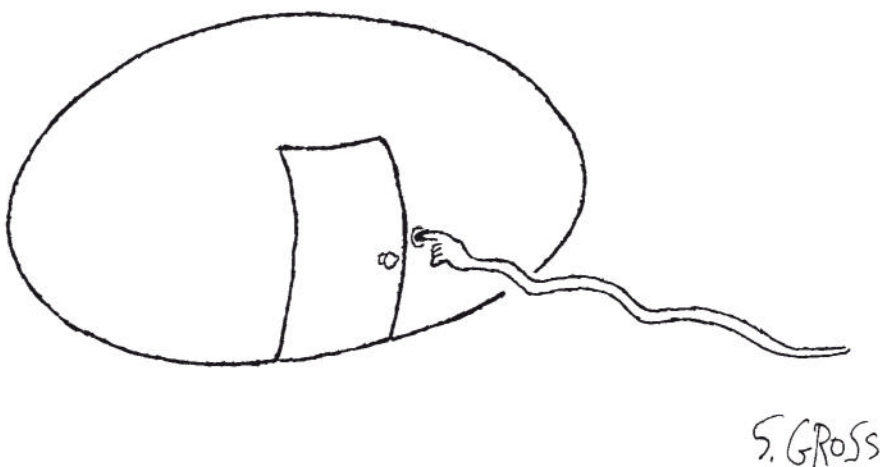
“He’s Defendant No. 28,” Salah said.

“Do you know what the charge is?” Dornstein asked.

Salah consulted her trial notes. She said, “It seems to be . . . bombmaking.”

Mas’ud stood accused of using remote-detonated explosive devices to booby-trap the cars of Libyan opposition members in 2011, after revolution broke out. According to the charge sheet, which Dornstein had someone translate from Arabic, Mas’ud was not Libyan by birth: he had been born in Tunisia, in 1951. “It changes things for me,” Dornstein told me. “The guy’s in jail. He was always the under-the-radar guy, and now he’s in a show trial.” He added, “There couldn’t have been any better confirmation that it was him than those charges.” Most striking to Dornstein was the fact that the bombmaker had not abandoned his career: decades after La Belle and Lockerbie, Mas’ud had continued to play a deadly role for Qaddafi. Presumably, there were other, more recent victims of his bombings—other family members, like Dornstein, who felt aggrieved. “It brings the whole thing into the messy present,” he said.

When I asked Brian Murtagh, the former lead U.S. prosecutor, about Dornstein’s findings, he became slightly defensive. Investigators knew about Mas’ud years ago, Murtagh told me, but, because he was so obscure, he remained a “could-have-been”: “Did we think, ‘Gee, if he’s the technical guy, maybe he put the bomb together’? Sure.



But we didn't have a picture of the guy." Murtagh argued that Dornstein, as a journalist, had certain advantages over government investigators: "For an F.B.I. agent to go to the places where Ken has gone, he would have to have permission from the Libyan government and the authorization of the State Department. Journalists don't have to play by the same rules." He continued, "We have jurisdiction to prosecute out the yin-yang, but if you can't *find* the person your jurisdiction doesn't amount to a whole lot."

There was some grim poetry in the Libyan trials—Mas'ud might have evaded justice for arming the bomb that blew up Pan Am Flight 103, yet when he was finally put on trial in Libya it was for bombmaking. At the same time, the outcome was frustrating, in that the trials, which were held in Tripoli, afforded little due process. Dornstein's commitment had always been more to truth than to justice, and it seemed unlikely that any truth about Mas'ud's role in Lockerbie would emerge from these proceedings.

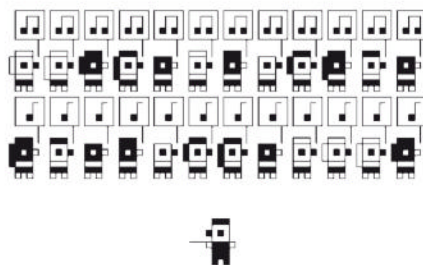
Dornstein was racing to finish his film. Tim Gruzca told me, "Everyone keeps asking, 'Do you have your ending?'" Dornstein's research suggested that Mas'ud was likely being held in a prison in Misrata. His needs as a filmmaker and his desire for emotional catharsis both seemed to be pointing in the same direction. Gruzca, who had covered many wars, was ready to go to Misrata. But Dornstein hesitated. "It's completely lawless now," he said of Libya.

After doing some research on the ground, Suliman Ali Zway, the fixer, counselled against an expedition, explaining that it would be one thing to take the risk if Mas'ud was living in a private home—but he was in prison. "We're never going to get access," Ali Zway said. Dornstein concluded, "It's too much risk for too little reward." On July 28th, Mas'ud was sentenced to ten years.

In early September, Dornstein called me and said, "A situation has developed." He had managed to get in touch with a middleman, in Malta, who said that he was a representative of the Libya Dawn militias—the rebel co-

alition that had administered the trials. The middleman had made a proposal: "Essentially, I have what seems to be a pretty high-level invitation to go to Malta, then fly on a chartered plane to Tripoli, interview Mas'ud, and get out."

This was a seductive offer, but there were reasons to be wary. Why would Libya Dawn facilitate such a meeting? It is an Islamist group, but it is now fighting ISIS, and Dornstein spec-



ulated that Libya Dawn saw the invitation as a way of currying favor with the U.S. "They're trying to show that they're a reasonable horse to back," he said. The security situation in Libya remained precarious. Even if Libya Dawn guaranteed safe passage, there were many ways to end up in serious trouble. In Tripoli and Misrata, the traffic alone posed a danger: "You're sitting next to a flatbed truck with a bunch of guys with guns. You could get carjacked and have nowhere to run." Eventually, Dornstein decided that Libya was simply not safe. It would be unfair to his wife and children to undertake such a risk on behalf of his dead brother.

More than once in our conversations, Dornstein referred to the story of Tantalus, who, in Greek mythology, reaches for fruit that will forever elude his grasp. He had spent more than three hundred and fifty thousand dollars making the film, maxing out credit cards and getting a home-equity loan. Even after he appeared to have decided not to go to Libya, he revisited the issue with me: "Let's say I *did* talk my way into the prison and got in front of this guy. I can't imagine that on a first meeting he's going to say, 'I'm so impressed with your detective work, I'm going to tell you everything.' In the Hollywood version, that's what happens, but not in this version. This isn't *Fitzcarraldo*."

I'm not Werner Herzog in the jungle." He continued, "There's a legitimate tension in the whole film between backward-looking things and forward-looking things. But this is a film that ends with me returning to my family and putting all this behind me." The documentary will appear in three installments on "Frontline," starting September 29th.

When I asked Ali Zway if he believed there was any final reckoning that might be enough for Dornstein, he said, "For Ken? It's never enough." Mas'ud is one man on Dornstein's list, he pointed out. "I'm sure that Ken has many more names. And now that he's found one he'll want to find more. I don't think he'll ever get closure. There's always something missing."

Once, when Dornstein was in college, he wanted to visit Yellowstone National Park. He didn't have any money to get there, and his father was disinclined to fund the trip. But David wrote him a check for three hundred dollars. Ken knew that David didn't have any money to speak of, either, so he never cashed the check. But he held on to it for years.

In 2006, after Ken published his book, he declared that he was done with Lockerbie. But he wasn't. When he and Geismar first started dating, he used to talk to her about the need to "continue" Dave. Can such a project ever end? On a cinematic level, Dornstein's decision to return to his family rather than risk being killed in Libya is a good ending. But will it be so simple in life? For the next ten years, Mas'ud is going to be sitting in a jail cell in Libya, and I wondered if Dornstein would be able to keep that thought at bay, even after completing a book and a film. When I met Geismar, I asked her if her husband might soon clear his Lockerbie files out of the attic.

"That's a good question," she said. "For so long, he's had a foot in the past and a foot in the present. He's been the prisoner and the jailer at the same time. I'm all about emotional closure. But all of this work he's done, I think it's about the process more than the result." She smiled, her face full of sadness and compassion. "Maybe this is a door that never gets closed." ♦





*Grimes's influences include Bikini Kill, the "Dune" novels, Mariah Carey, Joanna Newsom, and the British producer Burial. She described*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JASON NOCITO





PROFILES

## POP FOR MISFITS

*Can a former noise musician become a star?*

BY KELEFA SANNEH

It takes two hours and forty-five minutes to get from Los Angeles to San Diego by train, and a little longer than that if there is a mechanical delay, which on this day there was. Claire Boucher, curled up in a window seat on the train's non-ocean-view side, didn't seem to mind, or even notice. It was July, 2014, and, because she hates flying and doesn't relish driving, she was heading, slowly, to Comic-Con, which attracts huge numbers of geeks, many of whom bring along their alter egos. Boucher's alter ego is Grimes, the name under which, since 2009, she has been producing and singing homebrewed electronic music that is irreducibly weird but insistently pop, a term that describes both its sound and, increasingly, its reception. She fills tents at festivals, and this summer she toured with Lana Del Rey; her music videos have amassed tens of millions of views on YouTube. That weekend, Crave-Online, a media company aimed at young men, had hired Boucher—or, rather, Grimes—to be the celebrity d.j. at a party aboard the U.S.S. Midway, a decommissioned aircraft carrier moored in San Diego Bay.

"Should my d.j. set be more chill?" Boucher wondered, not for the first time. ("Chill," one of her favorite adjectives, can mean "mellow" or "good" or, most often, both.) "Or more dance?" She was thinking about songs, as she almost always is.

The intensity of Boucher's musical obsessions can make her seem like a mad pop scientist. On her bustling Tumblr page, she keeps track of her research into a cultural universe that seems, like its physical counterpart, to be expanding at an increasing rate. Her followers might encounter a snippet from the Japanese soundtrack composer Yoko Kanno, or a fan-made video set to the music of the electronic producer Aphex Twin, or a recent Selena Gomez single—which, Boucher has discovered, sounds particularly arresting in a car equipped with subwoofers. In her own songs, Boucher takes delight in rewriting the old music-industry story of the female performer in the spotlight and the male mastermind behind the curtain. "It's like I'm Phil Spector, and then there's Grimes, which is the girl group," she says. She

*one recent track by saying, "It's sonically as uncool as I could make it."*



got her start in Montreal, part of an underground experimental-music scene, but now she herself is the experiment, as she tries to figure out what “pop star” means in 2015, and whether she might become one.

For the moment, many of Boucher’s fans come from the world of indie rock, which has championed her as a new kind of pop auteur. One of her signature songs is “Oblivion,” an upbeat but ominous dance track; Boucher doesn’t sing it so much as haunt it. “Oblivion” never appeared on any *Billboard* chart, but last year Pitchfork, the definitive indie publication, called it the best song of the decade so far, which was a complicated sort of compliment. “Oblivion” was a great choice to top the Pitchfork list precisely because it was not an obvious choice.

These days, Boucher seems fascinated by the idea of making music that is as direct—as obvious—as the pop songs she loves. She acquired some important allies in 2013, when she signed with Roc Nation, the artist-management company founded by Jay Z, which counts Kanye West and

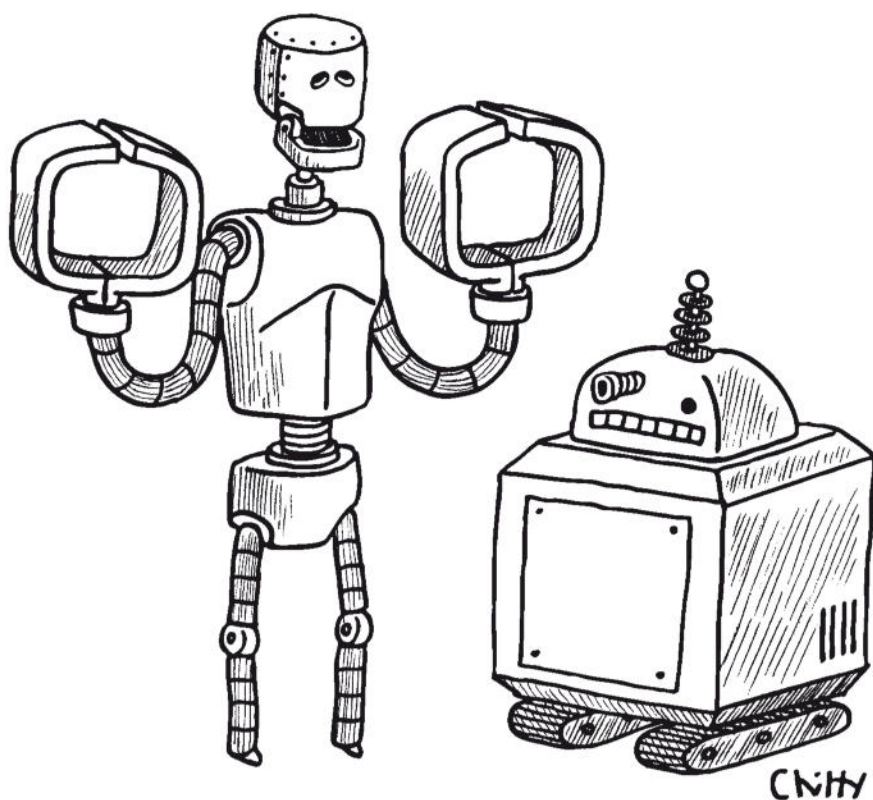
Shakira among its clients. But Boucher still records for a small label, 4AD, which gives her freedom from just about any imperative except the financial one—she can’t afford not to think practically about her career. She had accepted the nautical d.j. gig to fund her next music video. But it also gave her an excuse to go to Comic-Con, where she hoped to bump into someone from “Game of Thrones,” the HBO series. “Every season, there’s a wedding, and they have a band play,” she said. “I really want to do it.” She looked across the aisle at Lauren Valencia, a Roc Nation executive who was traveling with her.

“It has to happen,” Valencia said, playing along. “You might have to dye your hair, though—dark brown.”

“I’ll do it,” Boucher said. Her hair was bleached Khaleesi white, with a swath of purplish brown near her shoulders, and she was wearing clothes that marked her as someone with no particular fear of standing out: a slouchy men’s pin-striped blazer with short sleeves; baggy tuxedo pants; Adidas sandals with socks; round-lensed reflec-

tive sunglasses; and, on her sternum, an uneven coating of rainbow glitter. Her style is an imaginative elaboration of goth, drawing influences from gutter punk, high fashion, and Japanese culture. (She carries a fuzzy gray purse in the likeness of Totoro, the friendly spirit from a Hayao Miyazaki film.) The electronic producer known as d’Eon, who became friends with Boucher in Montreal, says that she has always had a knack for self-presentation; in the old days, she kept a tattoo gun in her bag, so that she could embellish herself whenever the mood struck. “I’ve met people that have never met her, that have the same hand tattoos that she has, just because they think it’s cool,” he says. More recently, Boucher has become an occasional presence in the fashion world. Karl Lagerfeld proclaimed her “fresh,” and dressed her in Chanel for the 2013 Met Gala. She is gangly enough to fit into sample sizes, and she has found fashion magazines to be surprisingly congenial—all that matters is that she look cool.

Boucher has a hard time censoring herself in interviews, or on social media, which means that she provides a steady stream of content for music Web sites, whose readers love to express their sharply differing opinions of her. “I feel like if I read about myself from the media I would hate me,” she says. “I’d be, like, ‘Fuck that bitch!’” Online, she has shared not only her enthusiasms but also her frustration with the music industry, where “women feel pressured to act like strippers and it’s ok to make rape threats but it’s not ok to say you’re a feminist.” Her outspokenness has helped to make her something of a role model. Musicians are now expected to advertise their political beliefs, but Boucher is unusually thoughtful and passionate about social injustice and environmental degradation. (She travels with a canteen, and has essentially banned plastic water bottles from her tour bus.) One particularly trenchant Tumblr post, from 2013, earned a vigorous endorsement from *Spin*, under the headline “GRIMES’ ANTI-SEXISM MANIFESTO IS REQUIRED READING (EVEN IF YOU’RE NOT A FAN).” That last phrase hints at what is, for Boucher,



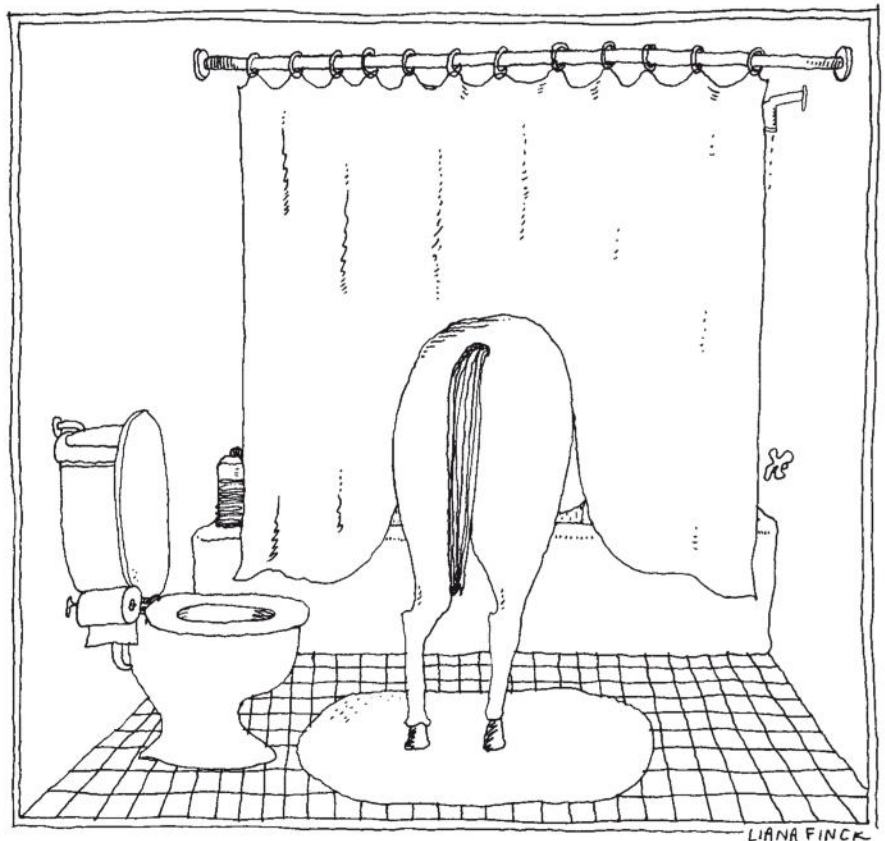
*“Darling Elizabeth! How I long to hold you  
betwixt my giant industrial clamps.”*

a disquieting possibility: that her on-line presence might be even more popular, and more influential, than her music.

This predicament owes a lot to Boucher's painstaking and intensely self-critical creative process. "Visions," the album containing "Oblivion," was released in January, 2012, and Grimes fans have been waiting ever since for the follow-up. The few tracks that Boucher has released, to keep them patient, seem to have had the opposite effect: "REALiTi," a warm and hazy eighties-inspired song about disillusionment, appeared online earlier this year, to general acclaim, but Boucher now downplays it, saying, "It's not *that* great." She has mixed feelings about lyrics, although she recognizes that they are an important part of nearly every hit in history. Often, she conceals her voice behind reverb, a very un-pop thing to do: radio programmers usually reward the kind of clarity that can be found more reliably in Boucher's social-media posts than in her songs. "REALiTi" comes from an album that Boucher recorded and then scrapped—it was too "disturbing," she says, and she decided that she wouldn't feel right disseminating such a hopeless message.

Boucher is twenty-seven, and the extended waiting period since "Visions" has now consumed more than half of her short career. She knows that her new album—her first since signing with Roc Nation—will be scrutinized not only by her fans but also by lots of people wondering whether she deserves all the attention she gets. Although she has not announced an exact release date, it is expected to arrive sometime in the next month or two. She sees it as her first proper album; all her other releases, she says, have been rushed and unfinished.

Last year, she moved to Los Angeles, settling not in one of the fashionable enclaves but in the Valley; after a few months, she was able to drive well enough to get herself downtown without hyperventilating. She learned how to play guitar and violin, and how to use Ableton Live, one of the standard music-production programs. Online, she provided irregular updates, which sometimes dou-



A CENTAUR TAKING A SHOWER

bled as advice to aspiring pop stars:

getting into this technique where i record a vocal take on my super crappy old 80 \$ live mic from like 2 years ago and then do a take on my nice mic and blend them together . . . and if u want a nice chorus doing like 2 other vocal takes on a good mic and mixing them super low and panned L, R 50% both ways creates a kool effect, like dolly parton meets bikini kill.

For a time, her interest in production threatened to overwhelm the process of writing. "I got too technical," she said. "Now I'm in the middle area, which is right between technical and, like, *vibe*." She likes figuring out what makes songs work, even though she knows that theoretical explanations are always unsatisfying. On the wall of her home studio, she keeps a version of "The Golden Rules of Pop," formulated by the prankish British electronic duo KLF:

1: IT MUST HAVE A DANCE GROOVE THAT RUNS ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE RECORD

2: NO LONGER THAN 3:30

3: INTRO -> VERSE -> CHORUS -> VERSE -> CHORUS -> BREAKDOWN -> DOUBLE CHORUS -> OUTRO

She doesn't necessarily follow these precepts, but she doesn't want to forget them, either—a paradox that sometimes makes her sound ambivalent about her big moment. "I like building expectations, and then stressing people out by explicitly not doing *the thing*," she says.

One of the people accompanying Boucher to San Diego was her boyfriend, James Brooks, a fellow-musician (he was formerly half of a duo called Elite Gymnastics) and an equally avid student of popular culture, though one who vibrates at a lower frequency. Their relationship began a few years ago, with an argument at a mutual friend's house, sparked by a televised countdown of Britney Spears's sexiest songs. Boucher was adamant that "... Baby One More Time," with its schoolgirl-skirt video, couldn't possibly



be ranked the sexiest, given that Spears was only sixteen when it was released. Brooks, more cynical, insisted that it would be, despite the unsettling implications. Boucher turned out to be right; more important, Brooks was graceful in defeat. "Everyone was, like, 'Oh, he's smarter than you, you're not going to like him, he'll be able to defeat all your stupid arguments,'" Boucher recalls. "But he's the only dude I've ever dated who won't give me shit for beating him at things."

On the train, Boucher had seemed excited about her d.j. set, but by the time she and Brooks boarded the aircraft carrier she had started to feel distinctly un-chill. In the cabin that served as the greenroom, she opened her laptop and plugged in a pair of studio-grade headphones, clicking anxiously through the songs in her library.

"I think you're overthinking it," Brooks said.

Boucher looked at him. "My last d.j. set was the worst experience of my life," she said. The previous summer, she had been invited to Ibiza to spin at Boiler Room, a roving party devoted to unimpeachably underground electronic dance music. She played distinctly unhip tracks like "We Like to Party," the jaunty 1998 dance-pop hit by Vengaboys, and Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You." (It was August.) She says that the attendees enjoyed themselves, but the party was also broadcast online, and the reaction on Twitter was brutal. One typical post accused Boucher of "awful, disgusting trolling." She responded that her selections had been sincere: "Nothing about anything I do is ironic."

When Brooks tried to reassure her that this set would be easier, she said, "I just don't want any more scandal, or any more death threats. It was terrifying, actually. And I didn't get a d.j. gig for a year."

The audience on the Midway turned out to be nothing like the one at Boiler Room. An m.c. pointed out the celebrities in attendance: "I saw Tom Green walking around!" And while a couple of dozen Grimes fans crowded around the d.j. booth, including a blue-haired Harry Potter in a pleated gray skirt, they were outnumbered by hundreds of oblivious junketeers. Despite the July

## THE POEM OF SELF

I often write in my diary the obsolete poem of self  
with my obsolescent pen and ink.

So I throw a poem for a lark, like my hat,  
off the Brooklyn Bridge, where Hart Crane, bless him,  
"dumped the ashes of his dad in a condom,"

I was told.

I watch my hat glide toward the Atlantic,  
wait for a miraculous rescue—  
but my poem-hat alights, drifts, sinks down  
among the bottom feeders,  
the fluke, crab, catfish in sewage  
of the East River, still musical, distantly related  
to the North Sea. I hope my drowned hat  
shelters blind, half-dead newborns  
that lip the taste of my sweatband,  
the taste of me their first breakfast  
of undigested unleavened waste.

The River Styx has clean water where Elijah  
swims with the Angels Gabriel and Raphael.

So the poem of self gone,  
poetry must face, may two-face,  
must honor the language, point out to readers  
the garden of delights, hell to paradise,  
almost, but never seen before.

Are the playhouses of God metaphors?  
Is God rhyme? The God of everyone obsolete?  
Then in the beginning was the Word,  
the Word, let's say, Fish, a live-bearer—  
the fish grew fins, then feet,  
asked questions without answers.

To wish or not to wish that is the question.

Every word is a question.

Put a question mark after each word,  
the question mark is a fish breaking water:  
poetry? mother? anything? kiss? glory?

heat, Boucher insisted, again, on playing "All I Want for Christmas Is You," and this time people cheered. Boucher was delighted, until she realized that they were applauding a pair of parachutists who had landed, spotlit, on the flight deck.

**B**oucher's career has been propelled by, and has helped to propel, a changing attitude in the community that surrounds what used to be called indie rock. The term once denoted both an economic ecosystem (small labels, crammed record stores) and a sound (tousled, punk-derived). But lately a musical world defined by its distance from

the mainstream has adopted a more conciliatory attitude. Few acts these days make a show of shunning commercial success, perhaps because, after a decade of turmoil, the corporate-pop monolith no longer seems so monolithic. Lady Gaga blazed a trail for truculent pop stars by treating her own celebrity as an evolving art project. More recently, Sia promoted a hit album while refusing to show her face to cameras or crowds. "I don't wanna go out and sell my soul, my body, my peace of mind," she said, and evidently she didn't have to.

The gap between indie rock and mainstream R. & B., in particular, has narrowed considerably: Caroline Polachek,

So remembering and forgetting are over,  
 useless boredom is plagiarized,  
 human beings are spawned,  
 trees genuflect, there are  
 Stop! Look! and Listen! prayers  
 at railroad crossings.  
 Truth is, *je, yo, ich*,  
 a Former Obsolete First-Person Pronoun,  
 stole the word “so” from a friend—  
 seems a petty theft but is a felony  
 when the word packs a deadly weapon.

Looking back, God is a verb, adjective,  
 article, contraction, infinitive, any part of speech,  
 any language, since every living thing speaks God.  
 God is a verb—  
 “he was godded once by the Lord,”  
 means created or killed, and God is a noun,  
 adjective, article, infinitive, any part of speech,  
 birdsong, neigh, hee-haw,  
 bark, bray, buzz, all God’s speech.  
 Now the poem of *you* is obsolete  
 and the poem of *he, she, we* obsolete—penis and vagina,  
 mouth, anus, hands  
 holding on for dear life to each other,  
 everything that dreams obsolete,  
 everything but what in the good old days we called “love.”  
 Now Johann Sebastian Bach  
 is a verb. Bach you! Bach you!  
 So help us or don’t help us, God,  
 we have the luxury of tears, others weep  
 with fluttering wings, falling leaves, so help us  
 or don’t help us, God,  
 breaking my vow, so help me God.

—Stanley Moss

of the band Chairlift, earned a writing and producing credit on the last Beyoncé album; Pitchfork tracks Frank Ocean and the Weeknd as intently as it does any rock band; and one of the most acclaimed new indie acts of recent years is a British singer known as FKA Twigs, whose skeletal, hypnotic abstractions are derived, however distantly, from slow jams. Last year, in an interview with Salon, A. C. Newman, of the Old Guard indie band the New Pornographers, took note of the changing climate. “A lot of what is considered hugely cool, popular indie rock these days sounds like nineties R. & B.,” he said. “Like, it doesn’t even sound like indie rock.”

This revolution—if that’s what it is—remains incomplete, as Boucher discovered when she used Tumblr to post her provisional list of the greatest songs of all time. The list, which ranged from Beyoncé to the shadowy British producer Burial, was a characteristically canny mixture of new and old, mainstream and marginal. When some readers scoffed, Boucher responded with an aesthetic statement of purpose, enumerating the feminist virtues of Beyoncé and the anti-racist significance of “Gangnam Style,” the global blockbuster by the Korean star PSY. She reminded readers that her music wouldn’t exist without the pop stars who inspired

it. “The first time I heard mariah carey it shattered the fabric of my existence and I started Grimes,” she wrote.

Boucher’s argument is complicated by her own career, which has been driven by the kind of idealism that mainstream pop stars must typically forgo. Exposure to the corporate music industry has only underscored her skepticism about the way it operates; she declines offers to collaborate with established producers and songwriters, which she sees as backhanded compliments, of a sort rarely paid to similarly accomplished male musicians. “That makes me feel really weird,” Boucher says. She produces and writes all Grimes songs herself, and engineers them, too; she recently taught herself how to insure that a drum machine she likes will sound equally good coming through night-club speakers and earbuds. “I can’t use an outside engineer,” she says. “Because, if I use an engineer, then people start being, like, ‘Oh! *That guy* just did it all.’” Beneath the surface of Boucher’s love of pop lies a political critique. “It’s a mostly male perspective—you’re mostly hearing male voices run through female performers,” she says. “I think some really good art comes of it, but it’s just, like, half the population is not really being heard.”

In San Diego, Boucher’s celebrity was powerful enough to let her skip the line at the “Game of Thrones” virtual-reality exhibit, which she found so seductive as to be slightly alarming. (“I felt an incredible yearning to go back into it forever,” she later wrote on Twitter.) But it was not sufficient to prevent her from freezing in the presence of George R. R. Martin, the author of the “Game of Thrones” books, whom she was introduced to at a Comic-Con party. A mutual friend told Martin, “This is Grimes, the next Lady Gaga.” Martin grasped Boucher’s hand, but she was too nervous to do much besides gaze at his face and repeat the last thing she had heard.

“Gaga,” she said, quietly. “Gaga.”

When Boucher was a girl, she startled classmates at her Catholic school by telling them that she was the Devil; to prove it, she spider-walked backward down the stairs,



like Linda Blair in “The Exorcist.” She grew up in Vancouver, tormented at school by peers who believed (not inaccurately) that she was kind of odd, and tussling at home with her four brothers. It was a strict household, and an accomplished one: her mother, Sandy Garossino, was a Crown Prosecutor and is now the editor-in-chief of the Vancouver Observer, an online publication; her father is an executive at a biotechnology company. Then, as now, Boucher was instinctively rebellious. At thirteen, she shaved her head, after which she found herself spending her days with fellow-outcasts: kids who were gay, kids who dressed strangely, kids who were obsessed with alternative music. Like socially marginalized high schoolers everywhere, Boucher developed a taste for Nine Inch Nails, the Smashing Pumpkins, Marilyn Manson, and Tool. This was music for teen-agers who got locked inside their high-school lockers—although the one time Boucher really did get locked inside her locker she thought, I can’t even feel bad about this, because it’s so cliché.

She moved to Montreal to attend McGill University, where she ranged through classes in neuroscience, philosophy, Russian, and electroacoustics. At one point, she devised a singularly impractical escape. With a friend, she travelled to Minnesota and constructed a houseboat; their sojourn ended when their new home was impounded by the local police, who considered it unsafe. Back in Montreal, she found a place in the city’s musical scene, which was in a rebuilding phase. In the early aughts, Montreal produced several big indie bands, none bigger than Arcade Fire. But by the decade’s end it seemed as if the launching-pad days had passed; what remained was a motley cohort of young people who often seemed to be making music for one another. Boucher, who didn’t think of herself as a musician, was pressed into service as a backing vocalist for Sean Nicholas Savage, a free-spirited songwriter, and then collaborated with an eerily intense crooner named Devon

Welsh, who soon began recording under the name Majical Cloudz, and who was, for a time, Boucher’s roommate and boyfriend. Boucher began writing songs, performing live with a ukulele and then, as she taught herself the rudiments of electronic music, a cheap keyboard.

From the start, Boucher was a focal point: she had a proactive approach to making friends, which involved identifying interesting-looking people and then bombarding them with attention. One fellow-musician remembers receiving, within hours of meeting her, a voluminous e-mail about music and performance and “human communication writ large.” She began recording songs using

GarageBand, the music program that comes preloaded on Apple computers. When she signed up for MySpace, she noticed that one of the options listed under “genre” was “grime.” The term connotes a streetwise British style, but she didn’t know that at the time, so she pluralized it and made it hers. Her first album was called “Geidi Primes,” and she considers it a sci-fi album, inspired by Frank Herbert’s “Dune” novels. A number of musicians in town were making so-called noise music, using instruments or electronics to push past conventions of melody and rhythm, and Boucher started a couple of noise groups. But she and a few friends also wanted to go the other way: they supplemented their diet of avant-garde music with regular doses of radio pop, and they came to view their relatively gentle, tuneful songs as small acts of radicalism, subverting the prevailing aesthetic of a radical scene.

Boucher’s love of mainstream pop has a defiant edge: she proclaims its virtues like a recent convert, which she is. Growing up, she wasn’t allowed to watch much television, and she didn’t pay close attention to the radio. Even now, she is constantly discovering gaps in her cultural knowledge. At a recent party thrown by the fashion label Rodarte, Boucher met one of her idols, the singer and musician Joanna Newsom. Later, Brooks mentioned Newsom’s husband, Andy Samberg, and Boucher

had never heard of him. Brooks explained that he was a former member of the “Saturday Night Live” cast, known for absurd music videos such as a “Pirates of the Caribbean” spoof co-starring Michael Bolton—which meant that he had to explain who Michael Bolton was, too. Boucher’s love of singers like Mariah Carey isn’t, as you might think, a form of nostalgia, because most pop music, no matter how old, is relatively new to her. One of the first Grimes songs to attract online attention was “Vanessa,” which has a prodding bass line that gestures toward night clubs, and dead-eyed lyrics that evoke the zombie sentimentalism of millennial Top Forty: “Hey, hey, you want to play, but, baby, I can go and go / And every other day, you’re running off with so-and-so.”

By the time Boucher was ready to release “Visions,” in 2012, she had resolved to leave college and pursue music full time. Only half in jest, she proclaimed herself C.E.O. of Grimes Corp., and signed a record deal with the respected indie label 4AD. The album’s first single was “Genesis,” an elegant little song that paired indistinct lyrics—something about “my heart”—with simple melodic figures: an ascending synthesizer line, a descending vocal melody. (Years ago, she told an interviewer that the recordings for the album began during an all-night speed-fuelled binge, but she has since sought to have this admission removed from her Wikipedia page, so as not to glamorize drug abuse.) The song was a viral hit, and then came “Oblivion.” Boucher sang lightly and casually, as if she were reciting a nursery rhyme, but she later revealed that the lyrics describe an assault that she has called “one of the shattering experiences of my life”:

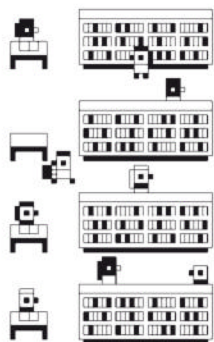
And never walk about after dark, it’s my point of view

‘Cause someone could break your neck, coming up behind you, always coming, and you’d never have a clue

And now I look behind all the time, I will wait forever

Always looking straight, thinking, counting all the hours you wait.

Like many exceptional pop songs, this one had an ambiguous refrain—“See you on a dark night”—that allowed



casual listeners to ignore the underlying narrative, something that Boucher found difficult. “I didn’t think the album would get popular,” she says. “And with ‘Oblivion,’ especially, I constantly have to think about this terrible thing that I never want to think about.” She has had to learn to hear “Oblivion” as her audience does—which is to say, to enjoy it. The music video, which Boucher co-directed, was shot at Percival Molson Stadium, on the campus of McGill, during a football scrimmage and a motocross race. Boucher, wearing large headphones while wandering through the throngs in the bleachers, sings and dances along to a song that only she can hear, looking very much as if she’s having fun.

Because Boucher is so recognizable, she tends to get recognized: one recent afternoon, at a restaurant in a suburban mall, a clean-cut young couple asked her to pose for a photograph with their baby. (“He listens to Grimes, too,” the mother said.) And so, when the doorbell rang one recent evening at her home, in the Valley, Boucher scurried out of view. There was no way to tell whether the man delivering Thai food was a Grimes fan, but she wasn’t inclined to take chances—she was living incognito on an unhip street, and hoping to keep it that way, so she stayed hidden while Brooks accepted a bag containing a few vegetarian curries. (Boucher generally doesn’t eat food made from animals, but she also resists absolutes, which has caused her a certain amount of trouble. At one point, she declared on her blog that she was taking a “one-day hiatus from veganism,” with the help of a pint of Ben & Jerry’s butterscotch ice cream; she heard back from a number of vegans who objected.) Brooks retrieved some bowls from the kitchen and set them up on a small table in the living room, where a wall was decorated with black-and-white photographs cut out from magazines: Lana Del Rey, Lady Gaga in Versace, Beyoncé and Jay Z, Britney Spears, Erykah Badu, and an image from an old *National Geographic* article about Vikings. Boucher is an accomplished visual artist—she recently drew the cover for a pop-inspired comic book called *The Wicked + The Divine*—

and she has a knack for pulling unlikely influences into her aesthetic world: even the oversized black Dixie Chicks T-shirt she was wearing that evening looked, somehow, a little bit goth.

When Boucher first arrived in California, she was thinking about retiring from performance. In the beginning, she had what she calls “a terrible reputation as a live act,” and the success of “Visions” led to engagements in front of crowds of thousands, which made Boucher anxious. She had always sung quietly, and in big rooms she found herself straining to belt out notes. “I would just cry all the time,” she says. “I’d be, like, ‘I can’t do it!’”

She thought about becoming a full-time songwriter, and took part in a few writing camps, where professionals get together to write songs to pitch to pop stars. With an old friend from Canada named Michael Diamond, who records as Blood Diamonds, she wrote a song called “Go,” which was intended for Rihanna, a fellow Roc Nation client. Rihanna didn’t record it, and so

Boucher released her own version, last year, on the music-sharing site SoundCloud, where it quickly became one of her most popular songs. (Boucher doesn’t consider it a Grimes song, because she didn’t produce it herself.) “Go” offers one version of what it might mean for Boucher to go mainstream. The wispy, melancholy verse gives way to what is known, in electronic dance music, as a drop: an instrumental break, concussive but euphoric, which is enforced by booming kick drums. Some of her fans felt that the song was too commercial, a distinction that Boucher doesn’t entirely recognize: “Mike and I both put a lot of effort into it—but we made it to be bought.”

It is easy to imagine Boucher recording a few more songs like “Go” and claiming a place on the lucrative E.D.M. circuit. Instead, she worked on the “disturbing” album that she finished and then scrapped, and also spent a stretch living with Brooks in rural western Canada, which she thought would be productive. (It wasn’t.) Eventually,



*“Lady, what’s going on down there is an affront to the very idea of boilers.”*



Boucher began to make some songs she liked, working at first in a converted bedroom in her California home. This past July, the room was dominated by a computer and a vocal pre-amplifier. A Mongolian flag hung on one wall, in tribute to Genghis Khan, with whom she had recently developed a complicated fixation. (She was still trying to decide how to measure his brilliance against his cruelty, and whether to include a song about him on the album.) On Twitter, she had been chronicling the difficult process of making a Grimes album. In January, she wrote, “now that indie music is obsessed with pop i feel completely bored by it.” Two months later, she hinted at a broader crisis of faith: “claire and grimes are completely different ppl at this point . . . and I can’t tell if I hate her.”

Boucher likes to say that her albums toggle between her two favorite literary genres, science fiction and fantasy. “‘Visions’ was sci-fi,” she says, recorded under the influence of high-tech pop stars like Beyoncé and Britney Spears. “And this album is fantasy,” inspired in part by Enya, the Irish singer who invented her own transfigured form of folk music. That night in the Valley, Boucher was just starting to get used to the idea of sharing this music with other people. She hadn’t yet allowed anyone from her record label to hear the songs, but that afternoon she had played some of them for Jay Z, who had been waiting for months. “Jay Z gave me a talk about being more confident when I play music,” Boucher said. “So I’m trying to implement that now.”

When she pressed Play, the sound that emerged was—Jay Z might have been relieved to hear—not obviously indebted to Enya. There was an easy-going hip-hop beat, intensified by snare rolls sampled from a marching band, and a playful keyboard line, the kind that you might pick out with one finger. Boucher’s vocals were pitched up, to make the song easier to sing onstage, where she often finds herself floating into her upper register. The song was “World Princess Part II,” a sequel of sorts to an old song of hers, a ghostly elegy called “World ♥ Princess.” Like many Grimes songs, this

one is deceptive. The lyrics, which can be hard to decipher, slowly reveal themselves to be meaner than they first sound, taking aim at someone—maybe someone in Montreal—who underestimated her:

I know, most likely, how I used to be: a frail and silly thought in your mind  
Call me unkind, you’re so far behind me  
But I can’t see something more than the things you try to take  
Now who made a mistake?

Another song, more punkish, sounded like a pop manifesto set to music: “Something you’re dismissive of is the reason I wake up.” But this recording was ineligible for the album, because Boucher didn’t write it: it was a cover of a track by Default Genders, Brooks’s current project. “The vocals are maybe kind of embarrassing,” Boucher said. “But they really liked it in the session.”

Brooks brightened—he was learning about this for the first time. “That’s all I need to hear,” he said. “If Jay Z likes my song, I’m good.”

The new songs were playful and pungent, and they seemed to change based on one’s frame of mind, like aural illusions. A number of them were as catchy as anything on the radio; one evoked the zippy charm of “Since U Been Gone,” by Kelly Clarkson. But they also sounded slightly alien, as if Boucher had resolved to obey the letter of pop-music law while declining to obey its spirit. The most lyric-driven song she played was her idea of a pop ballad—enlivened by an effervescent dancehall reggae beat. “It’s sonically as uncool as I could make it,” she said, proudly. “Kind of a hoedown vibe.” She pressed Pause. “And also Nine Inch Nails.” She pressed Play again, trying not to flinch as she heard her own voice: “The things they see in me, I cannot see myself/When you get bored of me, I’ll be back on the shelf.” Boucher likes to challenge—and sometimes torment—herself by resolving to do things she finds uncomfortable, like singing. For this song, which didn’t yet have a title, she had relied on non-technological assistance. “I took a couple of shots of tequila and did it—and ended up crying, alone, later in the night,” she said, then paused to

listen. “I feel like this song needs Auto-Tune. Or maybe it would be better without alcohol.”

Today’s music industry is not particularly hospitable to shy performers. Singers must generally go on the road, where they can earn a reliable income to supplement the unreliable income from selling, streaming, and licensing their music. Boucher finds this arrangement uncomfortable, and possibly unfair, but she accepts that there is no alternative to playing shows, and so she is getting better at it. She likes to perform in front of a powerful fan, which blows back her hair to create a small-budget version of a big-budget music video. “I’m shocked that more people don’t use fans,” she says. And she makes sure that her guarantee is big enough to pay for professional dancers, whose exertions allow her to concentrate on knob-twiddling, singing, or moving, as necessary.

Her tour with Lana Del Rey, this summer, paired her with another great music-maker who is more excited about recording than about performing live. Del Rey was scalded, early in her career, by an unsteady “Saturday Night Live” performance that was widely panned. (In an e-mail that was supposed to be private, the news anchor Brian Williams famously called it “one of the worst outings in SNL history.”) But, a year after the release of her major-label debut, a remix of one of its songs caught on in Europe, and eventually made the Top Ten in the U.S. Her success demonstrates how unpredictable the making of a pop star can be. Like Boucher, Del Rey doesn’t have any obvious predecessors. And, like Boucher, Del Rey has inspired a cult of fans online, attracted to both her music and her persona—in Del Rey’s case, an inventive mixture of old-Hollywood glamour and post-hip-hop decadence. In the modern, low-friction music industry, listeners are easy to reach but hard to retain. Clicking on a song doesn’t necessarily inspire a listener to do any biographical research; it may be easier than ever to record a popular song without becoming popular yourself. That makes charismatic singers like Del Rey, and perhaps

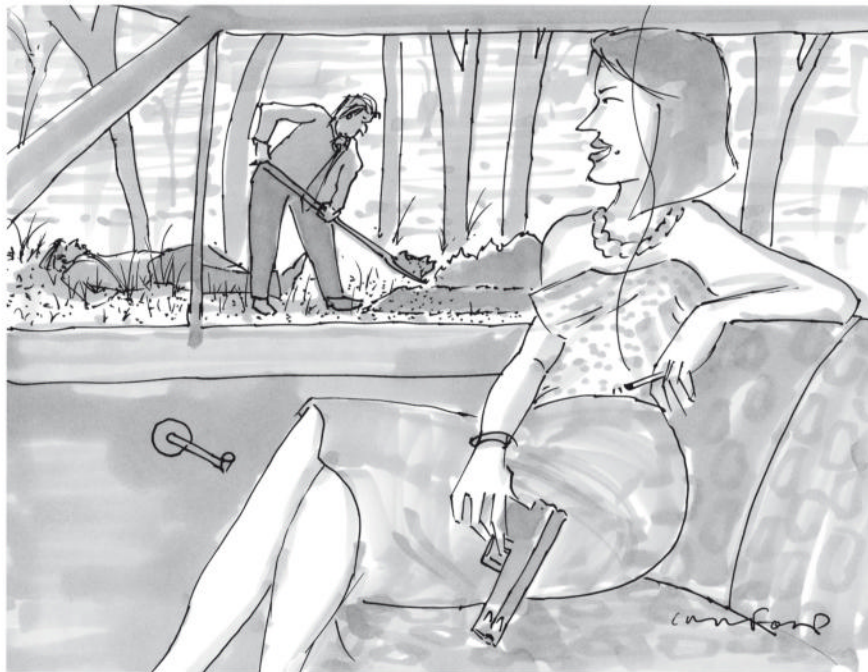
Boucher, particularly valuable: they have a knack for turning listeners into fans.

On one of the hottest days of the summer, the tour arrived at Jiffy Lube Live, a pavilion in exurban Virginia, outside Washington, D.C. The crowd was mainly young and female, and many of the attendees had dressed to reflect their fandom: some in flower crowns, for Del Rey, and others in dark colors, for Boucher. For this tour, Boucher had hired not just dancers but a backing vocalist, too: an emerging singer and songwriter known as Hana, who was positioned right next to Boucher and her keyboards, as if to emphasize that the star of the show was also—and perhaps mainly—a producer. Boucher danced along with her dancers and sang along with Hana, finding ways to slip her small voice beneath the big, thumping beats. (Boucher had reassembled many of her old songs so that they would be sturdy enough for big amphitheatre speakers.) After a few minutes, she called her tour manager over.

At first, it looked as if Boucher were complaining about the sound mix, but the manager returned with a small black garbage can, to which Boucher addressed herself, as discreetly as possible, while the beats kept thumping.

Even the fans in the front, singing along, probably didn't notice, and the ones who did surely didn't mind: watching Boucher fight through adversity is in some ways more fun than watching her hit all her marks. But after the show, restless beside Brooks in her tour bus, Boucher was frustrated. "Normally, I just zone out, and I pretend to be someone else," she said. "And today I couldn't—I was too sick." She says she suffers from a bacteria intolerance that makes it hard for her to digest food, and she had made the mistake of eating too close to showtime. "It wasn't a Grimes show," she said—the illness had made her too weak, and too self-conscious, to give herself over to the performance. "It was Claire pretending to be Grimes."

Her mood and her health were much improved when the tour arrived in Charlotte, forty-eight hours later—on a good night, Boucher is proud of her live show, which is an important asset for any musician seeking converts. When Boucher joined 4AD, in 2011,



*"What ever happened to cement shoes and the Hudson River, slowpoke?"*

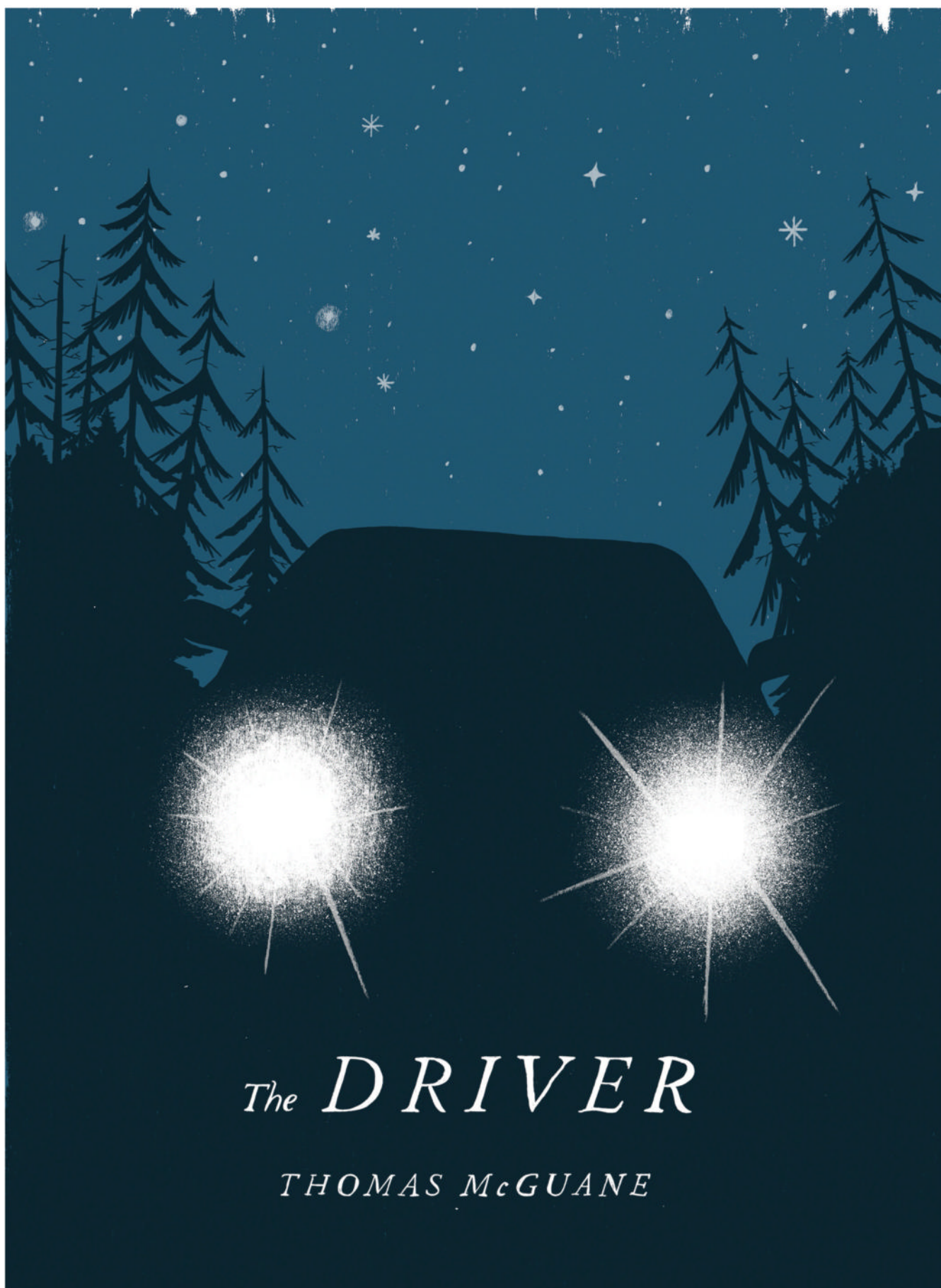
she was excited—the label was the longtime home of the Cocteau Twins, the gentle but eerie Scottish band of the nineteen-eighties, which Boucher had first heard as a teen-ager. Nowadays, the balance of power has shifted: she looks first to her powerful management team, not to her label, when considering her next moves. "They didn't sign Grimes because they want money," she says, of Roc Nation. "They signed Grimes because they want to diversify. And they're really adamant about me not feeling any pressure to do pop stuff." Boucher appeals to music executives because she seems unusually equipped to navigate a changing industry. She has mastered the kind of radical transparency that social media rewards, and, equally important, she makes music cheaply and on her own—a do-it-yourself approach that can make more traditional business models seem bloated and obsolete.

Of course, Roc Nation believes, too, that some of Boucher's new songs have a chance to succeed on the radio, which retains a surprising influence on the industry. One plan is to try to get a song onto rock stations this fall and then, next year, to launch a song into the pop mainstream. Boucher acknowledges that

she is a long shot, and says that she would be satisfied if her new record were merely "a successful indie album." But it would be slightly deflating if Boucher, after years of pop obsession, didn't find a way to become part of the thing that has captivated her.

If the time that Boucher spent in the Montreal underground taught her to appreciate mass culture, the time she has spent in Los Angeles, dodging condescending producers and scheming executives, has taught her how much she identifies, still, with her counter-cultural roots. The more pop she gets, the more punk she seems. There is a difference, Boucher has learned, between thinking that Mariah Carey is awesome and actually wanting to be Mariah Carey, which would require compromises she is unwilling to make. (Not to mention a singing voice that she doesn't have.) On the bus, Boucher was pondering her live show again: she liked having professional dancers, but she wanted to make sure that her quirky performance—which looks, even now, like something you might feel lucky to stumble upon in a darkened loft—didn't turn into a too-slick spectacle. "It can't be *full* bullshit," she said. "But there has to be a bit of bullshit." ♦





*The DRIVER*

*THOMAS McGUANE*

Mrs. Quantrill lived in a beautiful old Prairie-style house built in the twenties, which she had restored to its original elegance with Mr. Quantrill, a patent attorney attached to Montana's burgeoning natural-gas industry. Mrs. Quantrill had raised all kinds of hell getting the house listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Quantrills were known for their philanthropy and for elegant parties, featuring such high jinks as horses in the living room and mock gunfights on the lawn. Hereditary landowners who no longer lived on their land, they plied it for energy leases. They hung on to their cattle brands long after the last cow had gone down the road, beautiful single-iron brands from territorial days. When their son, Spencer, inherited the house many years later, he demolished it and replaced it with storage units. Even these fell into disrepair, and it was hard to know if they produced any income, because Spencer, who'd temporarily lived in one of the units, had long since moved away.

Such was Mrs. Quantrill's standing that her appearance in the grade-school principal's office, with the then nine-year-old Spencer in tow, required a bit of fanfare, which she provided by doffing her coat and abruptly removing her lovely gloves a finger at a time. Back then, before such people concealed their prominence, it was not unusual to dress up even for small occasions such as this one. Mrs. Quantrill was the tallest person in the room and very thin, with unblinking blue eyes. Spencer hovered beside her as Mr. Cooper, the principal, in a tan suit and referee's whistle, directed them to two chairs, then sidled behind his desk and sat down, fingers laced under his chin.

"Hi, Spencer."

"Hi."

"Thank you for coming, Mrs. Quantrill. Spencer's struggling. Aren't you, Spencer?"

"I guess so."

Spencer sat with his tennis shoes one atop the other and pushed his hair across his forehead. He seemed not to know what to do with his feet, his eyes, or his hands.

"Struggling how?" Mrs. Quantrill asked sharply.

"You describe it, Spencer."

"Can't pay attention?" He looked to his mother to see if that was the correct answer.

"What's the whistle for?" she asked the principal.

Mr. Cooper fingered the whistle as though noticing it for the first time and declined to answer. "I think Spencer wants to participate and enjoy things, but he often seems . . . stunned."

"Stunned?" Mrs. Quantrill said. "Hardly." Spencer reversed the order of his tennis shoes, placing his left foot on top of his right.

"Anyway, I think it might be in Spencer's best interest to let him enjoy a spell in special ed—get the pressure off him a bit and let him spread his wings."

"*Special ed?*" Mrs. Quantrill got to her feet, eyes flashing, plucked her coat from the back of her chair, and said, "Over my dead body."

"I see. What do you think is best?"

"I'll raise his standards in my own way. I have tickets to Bayreuth, and I shall take Spencer with me this year. No one leaves Wagner unimproved."

"Who?"

"Wagner!"

"Ah."

In the car, Mrs. Quantrill spoke non-stop. She glanced down Main Street and remarked, "What a hole." It was nearly dark, and most of the small businesses there were being closed and locked by their owners. "Mr. Cooper means well, Spencer. He wants to help you, and he's correct in noticing that your grades are not what they should be. That wretched water-bed outlet is finally going out of business! But we all develop at different speeds, and though I was tall and strong and popular at your age, your father was small and fearful, and just look how he turned out. The mighty oak, single acorn, et cetera. And, my angel, you're going to love Bayreuth, this year especially, because we will see 'Parsifal,' and you'll find out why Mommy calls you that, and you will be strengthened and return to school with something new that will be felt by everyone—students, teachers, and even nice Mr. Cooper, with that dopey whistle, who thought you should be in special ed. So let's break the news to Daddy: it's summer in Bavaria for all of us. Look, Spencer, there's that place where Daddy bought those Italian snow tires. Why did Daddy think Italians would know how to make snow tires? When he slid off the road in front of the airport, he found out how much they know! You probably think I was pretty rude to the principal, what's

his name, but no, Spencer, I was only being direct. I'm not a bad person. I thought the faster he knew my feelings the better. I'm just going to let this policeman pass me. I don't like feeling that I'm being followed, no matter who it is. Spencer, you're too quiet, and it makes me think you're disapproving. Are you asleep back there?"

After watching his mother leave the school parking lot without him, Spencer first considered going back into the school, but trying to explain to Mr. Cooper or anyone else how his mother just got caught up in her thoughts seemed to be beyond him. He was sure that if he waited she would eventually realize she had forgotten him, but standing there alone would have people wondering about him, so he set out walking, though it was almost dark and getting cold. If she hadn't driven off so fast, he would have been in his bedroom by now with his aquarium light turned on, the guppies and angelfish swimming around the bubbler or darting for the flakes of food he dropped.

He hadn't seen this street before. Of all the houses along it, only two had lights bright enough to show where the sidewalk was. Spencer looked back and tried to remember how many turns he had made and why he thought he had been heading toward more lights instead of fewer. He stopped. His hat was in his desk at school, and his head was getting cold, but the idea of knocking on a stranger's door to ask for a hat swept him with shyness and desperation.

A car turned onto the dark end of the street, and as its headlights hit Spencer it slowed to a crawl. Its lights were so bright that he covered his eyes until the car drew alongside him. Still blinded, Spencer could see no more than the outline of a man's head in the driver's window. It seemed a long time before the driver spoke. "Hello, son, you look like you could use a ride. Care to hop in?"

When Spencer opened the door to get in, the interior light came on, showing an older man with a white crewcut that stood straight up, wearing a buttoned sweater with a picture of an elk in its wool. Spencer got only a quick look, because when he closed the door the light went off and the man was just an outline again.

"Where are we headed, young man?"

Spencer didn't know what to say and so said nothing.



"Better tell me where or I'll run out of gas idling here like this."

Spencer felt anxious trying to come up with a plausible answer. The driver had put the car in gear but took it out again and sat back and crossed his arms. Under pressure, Spencer wanted to blink. Finally, he said, "Bayreuth."

"Buy-Rite? Jeez, that's way on the other side of town. And it's closed. Is someone picking you up at Buy-Rite?"

Spencer couldn't speak.

"I wish you'd say something. You want to play the radio? You want me to play the radio? O.K., no radio."

It occurred to Spencer that this was like school: he was always tongue-tied just when people wanted to help him. It would all get worked out at Bayreuth, he told himself, even if it was closed at this hour. His mother would take over the situation. She hadn't meant to forget him and would soon have him back with his aquarium. Today was Thursday, and sometimes on Fridays his father brought him a fish in a water-filled zip-lock bag. Last time, it had been a Siamese fighting fish upside down in the bag, and it had had to go down the toilet. Then his dad had done some research and explained to Spencer that until they got a better bubbler they really couldn't get another fish. So they got one with a little deep-sea

diver with bubbles coming out of his helmet, but so far no new fish.

The car stopped under the "LIVE WELL—PHARMACY—PHOTO CENTER" sign. "Is this it?" No one in sight. The pulsing red neon reflected off the dashboard and lit the side of the driver's face. Spencer needed his mother here to do the talking.

He managed, "Maybe not."

"Son, you gotta help me. Where do you want to go? I was supposed to be at the Legion ten minutes ago."

"Maybe back to the school."

"School is closed, too! O.K., please don't cry. I shouldn't have raised my voice, but this is getting to be a problem. There's a Buy Rite Auto on the frontage road. That sound like it? No?" The driver gripped the wheel hard, then rested his head on it. "Please tell me where to take you. Stop, don't open the glove compartment!"

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes, yes, put it back now. I have a permit for that. I need it. I'm a travelling salesman. Thank you."

"Someday, I'll have a gun." And a big mustache, he thought.

"When you're old enough and have received proper training. So, now where are we headed? Son, tell me the truth, do you actually want to go home?"

"There's the road," Spencer said, point-

ing to a road that angled off to the west, a road he had never seen before.

"How far?"

"It's quite a ways."

Soon, all the houses dropped away into the dark. It was possible to see the shapes of bluffs and, well back from the road and barely different from the stars, the occasional yard light at a ranch. A jackrabbit paused, lit up in the headlights, then vanished. For a while, the only sound was the pop of bugs against the windshield. The car came to a stop in the middle of the road, and the driver scratched his crewcut frantically with both hands, then covered his face. "I can see it now—kidnapping, child molester, the whole nine yards. Son, you have to get out of the car." When he uncovered his face, Spencer was playing with the gun again.

"Oh, boy, how were you raised, anyway? That's not a plaything." The man reached over and took the gun from Spencer. "I tried to help you. My conscience is clear. Out you go." Spencer gripped the seat and didn't budge. He wanted to keep going down the road. The man's voice came in a roar. "Get the fuck out now before I hit you over the head! You're starting to scare me."

Spencer opened the door, hoping the driver would change his mind, then got out and closed the door. He had wanted to speak, but as he searched through his mind nothing came to him. It was wonderful how the night smelled and how huge the stars seemed as the car pulled slowly away, pushing open a strip of road with its headlights. Once the sound of its motor had faded, a roar of insects filled the emptiness. Spencer was very still as he followed his happiness to its source and smiled to think, No one knows where I am. The driver was a nice man, but maybe this is better.

Then the lights of the distant car seemed to circle, and Spencer saw that it was coming back. He looked quickly to his left and to his right, but he couldn't move.

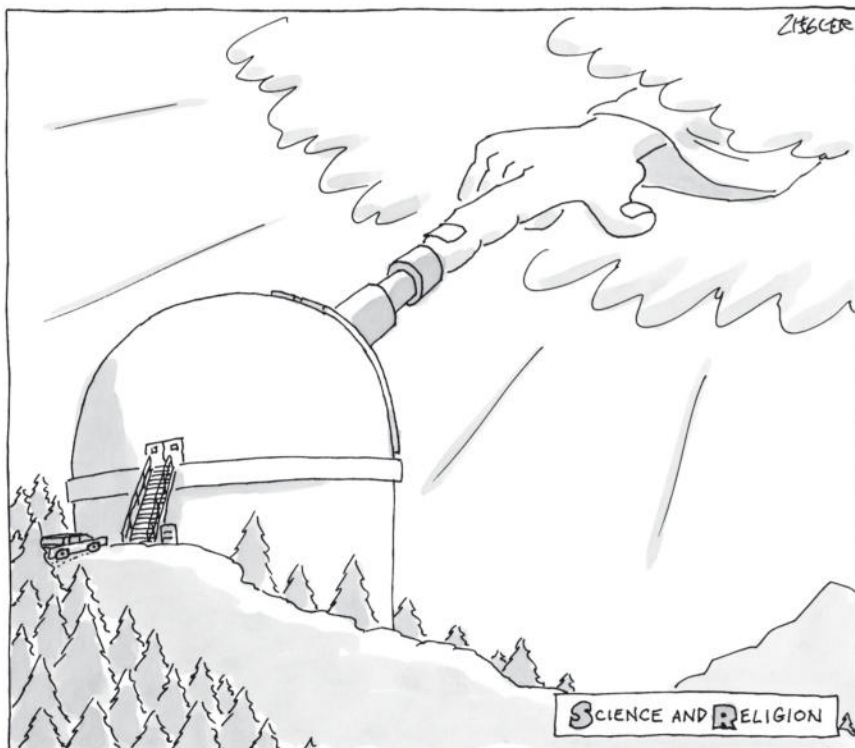
The driver leaned over to thrust open the passenger door. "Get in."

Spencer did so and closed the door.

"Son, I can't leave you out here by yourself. Something might happen to you."

"I wasn't scared."

"You don't know enough to be scared! God almighty!" As the car pulled forward, Spencer looked longingly into the



dark. He thought of his mother and wondered if she would remember to feed the fish. He pictured them at the surface of the aquarium looking up at him, expecting to be fed. "As soon as we get to some town, I'm going to find a phone. Yes sir-ree, Bob, I'm gonna find me a phone and figure out where you belong."

They crossed a creek on a noisy bridge where telephone poles had been stacked. Just beyond was an empty house and a car on blocks, then the road climbed slowly on a straightaway toward the first lights they had seen in a long time. As they approached, the driver slowed down, holding the top of his head with one hand: a sheriff's car was parked there, and several officers stood on either side of the road near it. "An accident? Doesn't seem like there's enough cars to have one." The driver rolled his window down. "But this is good, son. Maybe you'll talk to these fellers."

Two officers came to the driver's door. They looked hard through the window at Spencer, glanced at each other, pulled open the door, dragged the driver onto the road, and handcuffed him behind his back. The opposite door opened, and Spencer was swept into the arms of a burly deputy. There were lights everywhere, and Spencer cried, but not for the reasons the worried lawmen believed.

On the radio, in the papers, but mostly in people's mouths, news of the kidnapper ballooned. In town, the driver's relatives were dismayed to learn of this side of his character and anxious to put some distance between them and him. The interrogator from Helena was delayed by a passing hailstorm, and by the time he got to the town jail the driver had done away with himself, an expression that Spencer failed to understand and which his mother explained by using her hands to illustrate a bird flying off. Even so, he suspected that he was being misled. Now the newscasters were full of questions as to whether it had been moth-ball- or golf-ball-size hail. A widow up at Ten Mile went on TV with a hailstone the size of a grapefruit, but subsequent investigation revealed it to be something from her freezer. ♦

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Thomas McGuane on the dream that inspired "The Driver."

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# THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

## THE ART OF WITNESS

*How Primo Levi survived.*

BY JAMES WOOD

Primo Levi did not consider it heroic to have survived eleven months in Auschwitz. Like other witnesses of the concentration camps, he lamented that the best had perished and the worst had survived. But we who have survived relatively little find it hard to believe him. How could it be anything but heroic to have entered Hell and not been swallowed up? To have witnessed it with such delicate lucidity, such reserves of irony and even equanimity? Our incomprehension and our admiration combine to simplify the writer into a needily sincere amalgam: hero, saint, witness, redeemer. Thus his account of life in Auschwitz, *"If This Is a Man"* (1947), whose title is deliberately tentative and tremulous, was rewrapped, by his American publisher, in the heartier, how-to-ish banner *"Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity."* That edition praises the text as "a lasting testament to the indestructibility of the human spirit," though Levi often emphasized how quickly and efficiently the camps could destroy the human spirit. Another survivor, the writer Jean Améry, mistaking comprehension for concession, disapprovingly called Levi "the pardoner," though Levi repeatedly argued that he was interested in justice, not in indiscriminate forgiveness. A German official who had encountered Levi in the camp laboratory found in *"If This Is a Man"* an "overcoming of Judaism, a fulfillment of the Christian precept to love one's enemies, and a testimony of faith in Man."

And when Levi committed suicide, on April 11, 1987, many seemed to feel that the writer had somehow reneged on his own heroism.

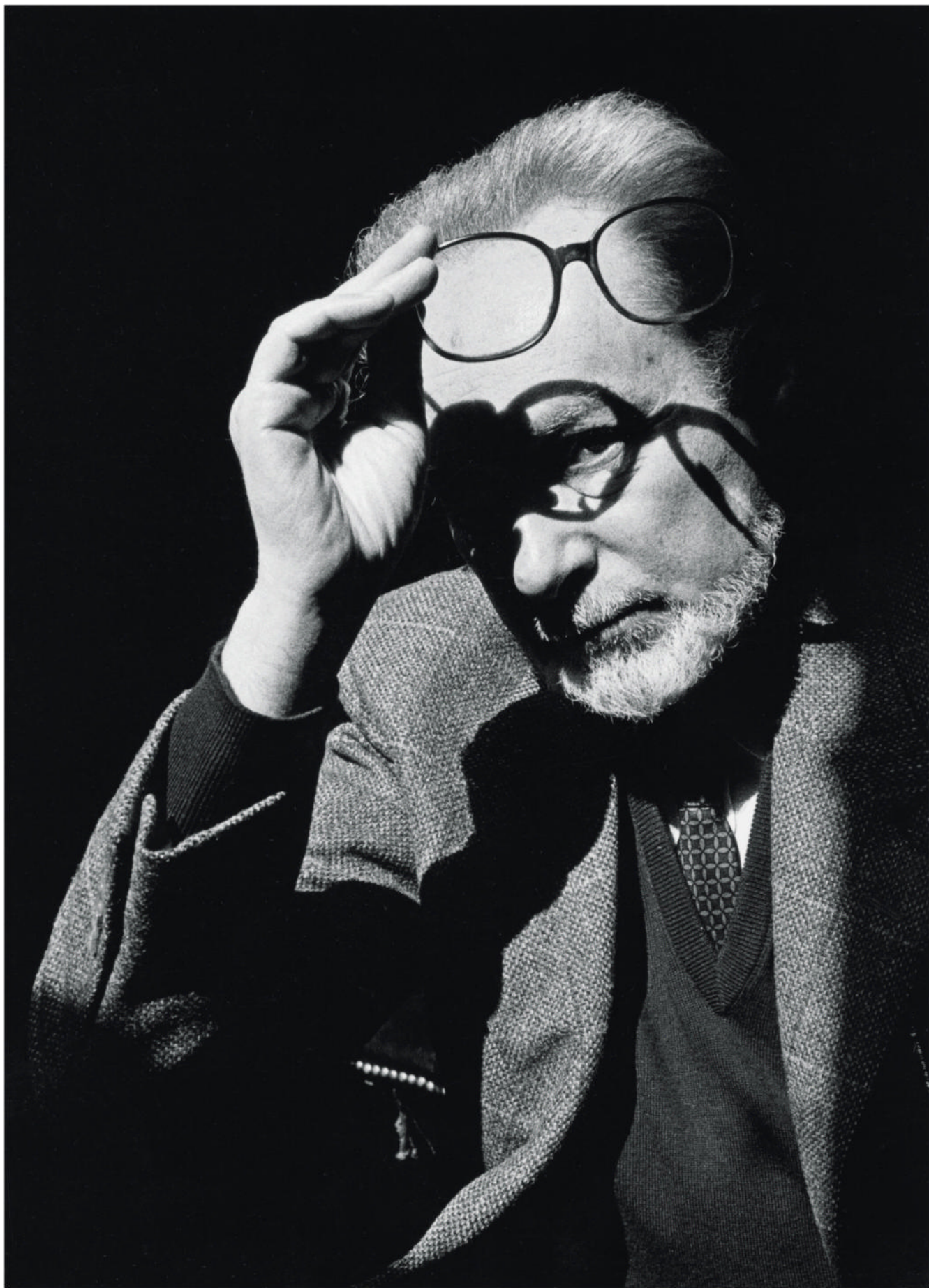
Levi *was* heroic; he was also modest, practical, elusive, coolly passionate, experimental and sometimes limited, refined and sometimes provincial. (He married a woman, Lucia Morpurgo, from his own class and background, and died in the same Turin apartment building in which he had been born.) For most of his life, he worked as an industrial chemist; he wrote some of his first book, *"If This Is a Man,"* while commuting to work on the train. Though his experiences in Auschwitz compelled him to write, and became his central subject, his writing is varied and worldly and often comic in spirit, even when he is dealing with terrible hardship. In addition to his two wartime memoirs, *"If This Is a Man"* and *"The Truce"* (first published in 1963, and renamed *"The Reawakening"* in the United States), and a final, searing inquiry into the life and afterlife of the concentration camp, *"The Drowned and the Saved"* (1986), he wrote realist fiction—a novel about a band of Jewish Second World War partisans, titled *"If Not Now, When?"* (1982)—and speculative fiction; also, poems, essays, newspaper articles, and a beautifully unclassifiable book, *"The Periodic Table"* (1975).

The publication of *"The Complete Works of Primo Levi"* (Liveright), in three volumes, represents a monumental and noble endeavor on the part of

its publisher, its general editor, Ann Goldstein, and the many translators who have produced new versions of Levi's work. Although his best-known work has already benefitted from fine English translation, it's a gift to have nearly all his writing gathered together, along with work that has not before been published in English (notably, a cache of uncollected essays, written between 1949 and 1987).

Primo Levi was born in Turin, in 1919, into a liberal family, and into an assimilated, educated Jewish-Italian world. He would write, in *"If This Is a Man,"* that when he first learned the name of his fateful destination, "Auschwitz" meant nothing to him. He only vaguely knew about the existence of Yiddish, "on the basis of a few quotes or jokes that my father, who worked for a few years in Hungary, had picked up." There were around a hundred and thirty thousand Italian Jews, and most of them were supporters of the Fascist government (at least until the race legislation of 1938, which announced a newly aggressive anti-Semitism); a cousin of Levi's, Eucardio Momigliano, had been one of the founders of the Fascist Party, in 1919. Levi's father was a member, though more out of convenience than commitment.

Levi gives ebullient life to this comfortable, sometimes eccentric world in *"The Periodic Table"*—a memoir, a history, an essay in elegy, and the best example of his various literary talents. What sets his writing apart from much Holocaust testimony is his relish for portraiture, the pleasure he takes in the palpability of other people, the human amplitude of his noticing. *"The Periodic Table"* abounds with funny sketches of Levi's relatives, who are celebrated and gently mocked in the chapter named "Argon," because, like the gas, they were generally inert: lazy, immobile characters given to witty conversation and idle speculation. Inert they may have been, but colorless they are not. Uncle Bramín falls in love with the goyish housemaid, declares that he will marry her, is thwarted by his parents, and, Oblomov-like, takes to his bed for the next twenty-two years. Nona Màlia, Levi's paternal grandmother, a woman of forbidding remoteness in old age, lives in near estrangement from her family, married



*Much writing by Holocaust survivors does not quite tell a tale, but Levi had a powerfully narrative imagination.*



to a Christian doctor. Perhaps “out of fear of making the wrong choice,” Nona Mália goes to shul and to the parish church on alternate days. Levi recalls that when he was a boy his father would take him every Sunday to visit his grandmother. The two would walk along Via Po, Levi’s father stopping to pet the cats, sniff the mushrooms, and look at the used books:

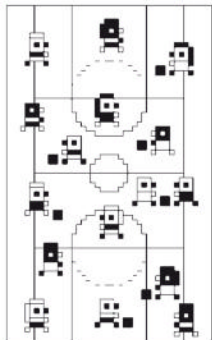
My father was l’Ingegnè, the Engineer, his pockets always bursting with books, known to all the salami makers because he checked with a slide rule the multiplication on the bill for the prosciutto. Not that he bought it with a light heart: rather superstitious than religious, he felt uneasy about breaking the rules of kashruth, but he liked prosciutto so much that, before the temptation of the shop windows, he yielded every time, sighing, cursing under his breath, and looking at me furtively, as if he feared my judgment or hoped for my complicity.

From an early age, Levi appears to have possessed many of the qualities of his later prose—meticulousness, curiosity, furious discretion, orderliness to the point of priggishness. In primary school, he was top of his class (his schoolmates cheered him on with “*Primo Levi Primo!*”). As a teen-ager at the Liceo D’Azeglio, Turin’s leading classical academy, he stood out for his cleverness, his smallness, and his Jewishness. He was bullied, and his health deteriorated. His English biographer Ian Thomson suggests that Levi developed a sense of himself as physically and sexually inadequate, and that his subsequent devotion to robust athletic pursuits, such as mountaineering and skiing, represented a self-improvement project. Thomson notes that, in later life, he recalled his mistreatment at school as “uniquely anti-Semitic,” and adds, “How far this impression was coloured by Levi’s eventual persecution is hard to tell.” But perhaps Thomson has it the wrong way round. Perhaps Levi’s extraordinary resilience in Auschwitz had something to do with a hardened determination not to be persecuted again.

On the basis of the first chapter of “The Periodic Table” alone, you know that you are in the hands of a true writer, someone equipped with an avaricious

and indexical memory, who knows how to animate his details, stage his scenes, and ration his anecdotes. It is a book one wants to keep quoting from (true of all Levi’s work, except, curiously, his fiction). With verve and vitality, “The Periodic Table” moves through the phases of Levi’s life: his excited discovery of chemistry, as a teen-ager; classes at the University of Turin with the rigorous but not unamusing “Professor P.,” who scornfully defies the Fascist injunction to wear a black shirt by donning a “comical black bib, several inches wide,” which comes untucked every time he makes one of his brusque movements. Levi admires the “obsessively clear” chemistry textbooks that his teacher has written, “filled with his stern disdain for humanity in general,” and recalls that the only time he was ever admitted to the professor’s office he saw on the blackboard the sentence “I do not want a funeral, alive or dead.”

Throughout, there are wittily pragmatic, original descriptions of minerals, gases, and metals, as in this description of zinc: “Zinc, *zinco*, *Zink*: laundry tubs are made of it, it’s an element that doesn’t say much to the imagination, it’s gray and its salts are colorless, it’s not toxic, it doesn’t provide gaudy chromatic reactions—in other words, it’s a boring element.” Levi writes tenderly about friends and colleagues, some of whom we encounter in his other writing—Giulia Vineis, “full of human warmth,



Catholic without being rigid, generous and disorderly”; Alberto Dalla Volta, who became Levi’s friend in Auschwitz and seemed uncannily immune to the poisons of camp life: “He was a man of strong goodwill, and had miraculously remained free, and his words and actions were free: he had not lowered his head, had not bowed his back. A gesture of his, a word, a laugh had liberating virtues, were a hole in the stiff fabric of the Lager. . . . I believe that no one, in that place, was more loved than he.”

The most moving chapter in “The Periodic Table” may be the one titled “Iron.” It recalls a friend, Sandro, who studied chemistry with Levi, and with whom he explored the joys of moun-

tain climbing. Like many of the people Levi admired, Sandro is physically and morally strong; he is painted as a headstrong child of nature out of a Jack London story. Seemingly made of iron, and bound to it by ancestry (his forebears were blacksmiths), Sandro practices chemistry as a trade, without apparent reflection; on weekends, he goes off to the mountains, to ski or climb, sometimes spending the night in a hayloft.

Levi tastes “freedom” with Sandro—a freedom perhaps from thinking, the freedom of the conquering body, of being on top of the mountain, of being “master of one’s destiny.” Sandro is a powerful presence on the page; aware of this, Levi plays his absence against his presence, informing us, in a beautiful lament at the end of the chapter, that Sandro was Sandro Delmastro, that he joined the military wing of the Action Party, and that in 1944 he was captured by the Fascists. He tried to escape, and was shot in the neck by a raw fifteen-year-old recruit. The elegy closes thus:

Today I know it’s hopeless to try to clothe a man in words, make him live again on the written page, especially a man like Sandro. He was not a man to talk about, or build monuments to, he who laughed at monuments: he was all in his actions, and when those ended nothing of him remained, nothing except words, precisely.

The word becomes the monument, even as Levi disowns the building of it.

One of the most eloquent of Levi’s rhetorical gestures is the way he moves between volume and silence, appearance and disappearance, life and death. Repeatedly, Levi tolls his bell of departure: these vivid human beings existed, and then they were gone. But, above all, they existed. Sandro, in “The Periodic Table” (“nothing of him remained”); Alberto, most beloved among the camp inmates, who died on the midwinter death march from Auschwitz (“Alberto did not return, and of him no trace remains”); Elias Lindzin, the “dwarf” (“Of his life as a free man, no one knows anything”); Mordo Nahum, “the Greek,” who helped Levi survive part of the long journey back to Italy (“We parted after a friendly conversation; and after that, since the whirlwind that had convulsed that old Europe, dragging it into a wild contra dance of

## THE LIMITS OF WHAT WE CAN DO

Neutrality is a privilege. The rocks we throw ourselves onto are a privilege. It is hard to hate creation on the first day of warmth, but I am vigilant and a sac still fills up my mother and a sac fills up my father and a sac deflates my grandmother and I have no sense of sac. Tory Dent describes her slow dying as “sham orgasms” and I’m thinking of expansion, how I read “HIV, Mon Amour” first in the sun on a day in May with my beach-body and my coffee to stay. I know what I’m doing with this poem is a sham the way I knew I knew my vivacious privilege was a portrait of a bad institution, capitalism fingered my throat with its delicious incentives of eat and I did eat because I had touched love and love knew what to do with me. I like poetry because there are no miracles in it, it is like the dream I had about disease nestled marked curled as a burst blood vessel in the eyeball, that to own up to the mark was to look up inside your skull for others to see it. The poem is doomed and swimming in fluid. In my dream I wrote an article for *Slate* called “The Limits of What We Can Do” in the face of annihilation and it was received well. I wake up nestled marked curled like clickbait, a deep-sea fishing net. I throw up yarn and go for a run. A love inside of me is breaking.

—Natalie Eilbert

separations and meetings, had come to rest, I never saw my Greek master again, or heard news of him”). And the “drowned,” those who went under—“leaving no trace in anyone’s memory.” Levi rings the bell even for himself, who in some way disappeared into his tattooed number: “At a distance of thirty years, I find it difficult to reconstruct what sort of human specimen, in November of 1944, corresponded to my name, or, rather, my number: 174517.”

In the fall of 1943, Levi and his friends formed a band of anti-Fascist partisans. It was an amateurish group, poorly equipped and ill trained, and Italian Fascist soldiers captured part of his unit in the early hours of December 13th. Levi had an obviously false identity card, which he ate (“The photograph was particularly revolting”). But the action availed him little: the interrogating officer told him that if he was a partisan he would be immediately shot; if he was a Jew he would be sent to a holding camp near Carpi. Levi held out for a while, and then chose to con-

fess his Jewishness, “in part out of weariness, in part also out of an irrational point of pride.” He was sent to a detention camp at Fossoli, near Modena, where conditions were tolerable: there were P.O.W.s and political prisoners of different nationalities, there was mail delivery, and there was no forced labor. But in the middle of February, 1944, the S.S. took over the running of the camp and announced that all the Jews would be leaving: they were told to prepare for two weeks of travel. A train of twelve closed freight cars left on the evening of February 22nd, packed with six hundred and fifty people. Upon their arrival at Auschwitz, more than five hundred were selected for death; the others, ninety-six men and twenty-nine women, entered the *Lager* (Levi always preferred the German word for prison). At Auschwitz, Levi was imprisoned in a work camp that was supposed to produce a rubber called Buna, though none was actually manufactured. He spent almost a year as a prisoner, and then almost nine months returning home. “Of

six hundred and fifty,” he wrote in “The Truce,” “three of us were returning.” Those are the facts, the abominable and precious facts.

There is a Talmudic commentary that argues that “Job never existed and was just a parable.” The Israeli poet and concentration-camp survivor Dan Pagis replies to this easy erasure in his poem “Homily.” Despite the obvious inequality of the theological contest, Pagis says, Job passed God’s test without even realizing it. He defeated Satan with his very silence. We might imagine, Pagis continues, that the most terrible thing about the story is that Job didn’t understand whom he had defeated, or that he had even won the battle. Not true. For then comes an extraordinary final line: “But in fact, the most terrible thing of all is that Job never existed and is just a parable.”

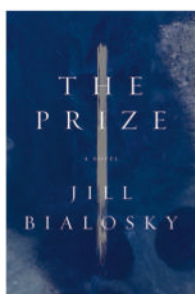
Pagis’s poem means: “Job did exist, because Job was in the death camps. Suffering is not the most terrible thing; worse is to have the reality of one’s suffering erased.” In just this way, Levi’s writing insists that Job existed and was not a parable. His clarity is ontological and moral: these things happened, a victim witnessed them, and they must never be erased or forgotten. There are many such facts in Levi’s books of testament. The reader is quickly introduced to the principle of scarcity, in which everything—every detail, object, and fact—becomes essential, for everything will be stolen: wire, rags, paper, bowl, a spoon, bread. The prisoners learn to hold their bowls under their chins so as not to lose the crumbs. They shorten their nails with their teeth. “Death begins with the shoes.” Infection enters through wounds in the feet, swollen by edema; ill-fitting shoes can be catastrophic. Hunger is perpetual, overwhelming, and fatal for most: “The Lager is hunger.” In their sleep, many of the prisoners lick their lips and move their jaws, dreaming of food. Reveille is brutally early, before dawn. As the prisoners trudge off to work, sadistic, infernal music accompanies them: a band of prisoners is forced to play marches and popular tunes; Levi says that the pounding of the bass drum and the clashing of the cymbals is “the voice of the Lager” and the last thing about it he will forget. And present everywhere



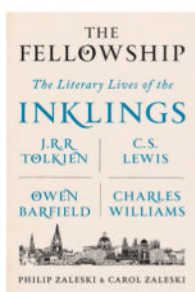
## BRIEFLY NOTED



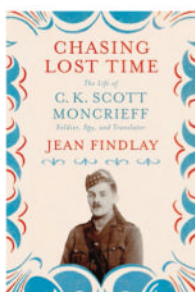
**BEST BOY**, by *Eli Gottlieb* (*Liveright*). Todd, a middle-aged autistic resident of Payton LivingCenter, and the narrator of this novel, describes the disturbances that ensue after an employee starts using him in a nefarious scheme. He dreams of living with his brother's family, whose carefully managed dynamics he upsets in ways he scarcely understands. The novel pokes gentle fun at well-meaning psychobabble, and Todd's voice is arresting: the employee looks "like I'd just kicked dirt onto the white cake of his life." Discussions of autism-spectrum disorder sometimes stick out a little, but the book's empathy is bracing: people with ASD "can have children and suits and wear watches while flying on planes. . . . Maybe they're even marrying you."



**THE PRIZE**, by *Jill Bialosky* (*Counterpoint*). This sharp-eyed novel of the art world follows the fortunes of a partner in a prestigious New York gallery who struggles with the memory of his brilliant but volatile father, the tempers of a high-maintenance artist and her competitive husband, the distress of a rocky marriage, and the temptation of extramarital adventure. The novel's characters are caught in predictable midlife crises—"Do you ever wake up and wonder how you got here?" one asks—but Bialosky deepens our sense of these troubles with well-chosen details, such as the protagonist's luxury-goods addiction. The plot is well crafted, carrying the reader to a surprising end.



**THE FELLOWSHIP**, by *Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski* (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). For two decades starting in the nineteen-thirties, a group of Oxford academics and writers calling themselves the Inklings met weekly to share works in progress and exchange ideas. The leaders were J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, and this account of the group's activities emphasizes the academic underpinnings of "The Lord of the Rings," "The Chronicles of Narnia," and, by extension, the modern fantasy genre. Inklings discussions ranged across language, religion, and the Middle Ages, and when Tolkien, a pioneering philologist, came to imagine Middle Earth, he began by devising the Elvish languages. A persistent interest for the group was the role of myth, which Tolkien believed represented a distillation of humankind's desires.



**CHASING LOST TIME**, by *Jean Findlay* (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). This biography of C. K. Scott Moncrieff, Proust's first English translator, is by one of his descendants. Though the work on Proust is discussed, it is far from central to the book, which examines Scott Moncrieff in his own right: his service as a soldier in the First World War and as a spy in Fascist Italy, his development as a poet and a translator, and his secret gay life—much of which is revealed through his entertaining correspondence. Findlay ably amplifies her portrait with family history and evocations of the Edwardian literary scene. There are moving surprises along the way, such as Scott Moncrieff's great love for the (heterosexual) poet Wilfred Owen, who was killed in the war.

is what he called the "useless violence" of the camp: the screaming and beatings and humiliations, the enforced nakedness, the absurdist regulatory regimen, with its sadism of paradox—the fact, say, that every prisoner needed a spoon but was not issued one and had to find it himself on the black market (when the camp was liberated, Levi writes, a huge stash of brand-new plastic spoons was discovered), or the fanatically prolonged daily roll call, which took place in all weathers, and which required militaristic precision from wraiths in rags, already half dead.

Many of these horrifying facts can be found in testimony by other witnesses. What is different about Levi's work is bound up with his uncommon ability to tell a story. It is striking how much writing by survivors does not quite tell a story; it has often been poetic (Paul Celan, Dan Pagis, Yehiel De-Nur), or analytical, reportorial, anthropological, philosophical (Jean Améry, Germaine Tillion, Eugen Kogon, Viktor Frankl). The emphasis falls, for understandable reasons, on lament, on a liturgy of tears; or on immediate precision, on bringing concrete news, and on the attempt at comprehension. When Viktor Frankl introduces, in his book "Man's Search for Meaning," the subject of food in Auschwitz, he does so thus: "Because of the high degree of undernourishment which the prisoners suffered, it was natural that the desire for food was the major primitive instinct around which mental life centered." Along with this scientific mastering of the information comes something like a wariness of narrative naïveté: such writers frequently move back and forth in time, plucking and massing details thematically, from different periods in and outside the camps. Surely, Frankl's rhetoric calmly insists, "this material did not master me; I master it." (This gesture can be found even in some Holocaust fiction: Jorge Semprún, who survived Buchenwald, enacts such a formal freedom from temporality in his novel "The Long Voyage"; the book is set on the train en route to the camp, but breaks forward to encompass the entire camp experience.)

Levi's prose has a tone of similar command, and in his last book, "The

Drowned and the Saved,” he became such an analyst, grouping material by theme rather than telling stories. Nor did he always tell his stories in conventional sequential fashion. But “If This Is a Man” and “The Truce” are powerful because they do not disdain story. They unfold their material, bolt by bolt. We begin “If This Is a Man” with Levi’s capture in 1943, and we end it with the camp’s liberation by the Russians, in January, 1945. Then we continue the journey in “The Truce,” as Levi finds his long, Odyssean way home. Everything is new, everything is introduction, and so the reader sees with Levi’s disbelieving eyes. He introduces thirst like this: “Will they give us something to drink? No, they line us up again, lead us to a huge square.” He first mentions the now infamous refrain “The only way out is through the chimney” thus: “What does it mean? We’ll soon learn very well what it means.” To register his discoveries, he often breaks from the past tense into a diaristic present.

The result is a kind of ethics, when the writer is constantly registering the moral (which is to say, in this case, the immoral) novelty of the details he encounters. That is why every reader who has opened “If This Is a Man” feels impelled to continue reading it, despite the horror of the material. Levi seems to join us in our incomprehension, which is both a narrative astonishment and a moral astonishment. The victims’ ignorance of the name “Auschwitz” tells us everything, actually and symbolically. For Levi, “Auschwitz” had not, until this moment, existed. It had to be invented, and it had to be introduced into his life. Evil is not the absence of the good, as theology and philosophy have sometimes maintained. It is the invention of the bad: Job existed and was not a parable. Levi registers the same astonishment when first hit by a German officer—“a profound amazement: how can one strike a man without anger?” Or when, driven by thirst, he breaks off an icicle only to have it snatched away by a guard. “Why?” Levi asks. To which comes the answer “*Hier ist kein warum*” (“Here there is no why”). Or when Alex the Kapo, a professional criminal who has been given limited power over other prisoners, wipes his greasy hand on Levi’s shoulder, as if the other man were not a man. Or when

Levi, who was fortunate enough to be chosen to work as a chemist, in the Buna laboratory, comes face to face with his chemistry examiner, Dr. Pannwitz, who raises his eyes to glance at his victim: “That look did not pass between two men; and if I knew how to explain fully the nature of that look, exchanged as if through the glass wall of an aquarium between two beings who inhabit different worlds, I would also be able to explain the essence of the great insanity of the Third Reich.”

Levi frequently emphasized that his survival in Auschwitz owed much to his youth and strength; to the fact that he understood some German (many of those who didn’t, he observed, died in the first weeks); to his training as a chemist, which had refined his habits of curiosity and observation, and which permitted him, in the last months of his incarceration, to work indoors, in a warm laboratory, while the Polish winter did its own fatal selection of the less fortunate; and to other accidents of luck. Among these last were timing (he arrived relatively late in the progress of the war) and what seems to have been a great capacity for friendship. He describes himself, in “The Periodic Table,” as one of those people to whom others tell their stories. In a world of terminal individualism, in which every person had to fight to live, he did not let this scarred opportunism become his only mode of survival. He was wounded like everyone else, but with resources that seem, to most of his readers, unfathomable and mysterious he did not lose the ability to heal and to be healed. He helped others, and they helped him. Both “If This Is a Man” and “The Truce” contain beautiful portraits of goodness and charity, and it is not the punishers and sadists but the life-givers—the fortifiers, the endurers, the men and women who sustained Levi in his struggle to survive—who burst out of these pages. Steinlauf, who is nearly fifty, a former sergeant in the Austro-Hungarian Army and a veteran of the Great War, tells Levi, severely, that he must wash regularly and keep his shoes polished and walk upright, because the *Lager* is a vast machine that exists to reduce its victims to beasts, and “we must not become beasts.”

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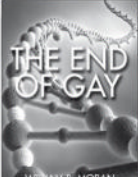


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a mason from Levi's Piedmont area, a non-Jew, whom Levi credited with saving his life. The two met in June, 1943 (Levi was working on a bricklaying team, and Lorenzo was one of the chief masons). For the next six months, Lorenzo smuggled extra food to his fellow-Italian and, even more dangerous, helped him send letters to his family in Italy. (As a "volunteer worker" for the Reich—i.e., a slave laborer—Lorenzo had privileges beyond the dreams of any Jewish prisoner.) And as crucial as the material support was Lorenzo's presence, which reminded Levi, "by his natural and plain manner of being good, that a just world still existed outside ours. . . . Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man."

You can feel this emphasis on moral resistance in every sentence Levi wrote: his prose is a form of keeping his boots shined and his posture proudly upright. It is a style that seems at first window-pane clear but is actually full of undulating strategies. He is acclaimed for the purity of his style and sometimes faulted for his reticence or coldness. But Levi is "cold" only in the way that the air is suddenly cold when you pull slightly away from a powerful fire. His composure is passionate lament, resistance, affirmation. Nor is he so plain. He is not afraid of rhetorical expansion, particularly when writing forms of elegy. "If This Is a Man" is shot through with sentences of tragic grandeur: "Dawn came upon us like a betrayal, as if the new sun were an ally of the men who had decided to destroy us. . . . Now, in the hour of decision, we said to each other things that are not said among the living." He loves adjectives and adverbs: he admired Joseph Conrad, and sometimes sounds like him, except that, while Conrad can throw his modifiers around pugilistically (the heavier the words the better), Levi employs his with tidy force. The Christian doctor whom Nona Mália married is described as "majestic, bearded, and taciturn"; Rita, a fellow-student, has "her shabby clothes, her firm gaze, her concrete sadness"; Cesare, one of those morally strong, physically vital men who sustain Levi in time of need, is "very ignorant, very innocent, and very civilized." In Auschwitz, the drowned, those

who are slipping away into death, drift in "an opaque inner solitude."

This is a classical prose, the possession of a civilized man who never expected that his humane irony would have to battle with its moral opposite. But, once the battle is joined, Levi makes that irony into a formidable weapon. Consider these words: "fortune," "detached study," "charitably," "enchantment," "discreet and sedate," "equanimity," "adventure," "university." All of them, remarkably, are used by Levi to describe aspects of his experiences in the camp. "It was my good fortune to be deported to Auschwitz only in 1944." This is how, with scandalous coolness, he begins "If This Is a Man," calmly deploying the twinned resources of "*fortuna*" in Italian, which combines the senses of good fortune and fate. In the same preface to his first book, Levi promises a "detached study" of what befell him. The hellish marching music of the camp is described as an "enchantment" from which one must escape. In "The Drowned and the Saved," Levi describes a moment of crisis when he knows he is about to be selected to live or die. He briefly wavers, and almost begs help from a God he does not believe in. But "equanimity prevailed," he writes, and he resists the temptation. Equanimity!

In the same book, he includes a letter he wrote in 1960 to his German translator, in which he announces that his time in the *Lager*, and writing about the *Lager*, "was an important adventure that has profoundly modified me." The Italian is "*una importante avventura, che mi ha modificato profondamente*," which Raymond Rosenthal's original translation, of 1988, follows; the new "Complete Works" weakens the irony by turning it into "an ordeal that changed me deeply." For surely the power of these impeccable words, as so often in Levi, is moral. First, they register their contamination by what befell them (the "adventure," we think, should not be called that; it must be described as an "ordeal"); and then they dryly repel that contamination (no, we will insist on calling the experience, with full ironic power, an "adventure").

In the same spirit of calmly rebellious irony, "If This Is a Man" ends almost casually, like a conventional nineteenth-century realist novel, with cheer-

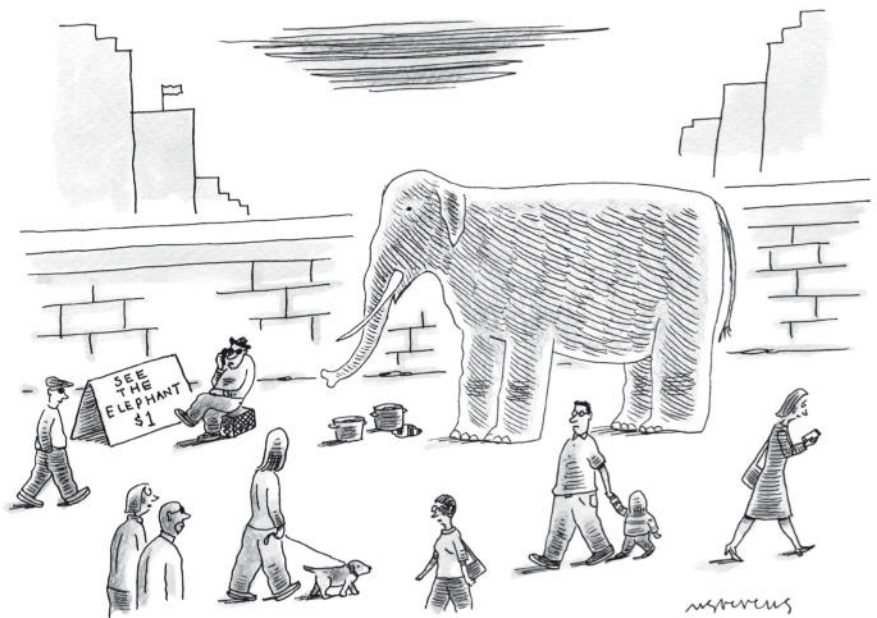
ful news of continuity and welfare beyond its pages: "In April, at Katowice, I met Schenck and Alcalai in good health. Arthur has happily rejoined his family and Charles has returned to his profession as a teacher; we have exchanged long letters and I hope to see him again one day." That emphasis on resistance makes its sequel, "The Truce," not merely funny but joyous: the camps are no more, the Germans have been vanquished, and gentler life, like a moral sun, is returning. There may be nothing more moving in all of Levi's work than a moment, early in "The Truce," when, after the months in Auschwitz, a very sick Levi is helped down from a cart by two Russian nurses. The first Russian words he hears are "*Po malu, po malu!*"—"Slowly, slowly!"; or, even better in the Italian, "*Adagio, adagio!*" This soft charity falls like balm on the text.

Saul Bellow once said that all the great modern novelists were really attempting a definition of human nature, in order to justify the continuation of life and of their craft. This is preëminently true of Primo Levi, even if we feel, at times, that it is a project thrust upon him by fortune. In some respects, Levi's vision is pessimistic, because he reminds us "how empty is the myth of original equality among men." In Auschwitz, the already strong prospered—because they were physically or morally tougher than others, or because they were less sensitive, and greedier and more cynical in the will to live. (Jean Améry, who was tortured by the S.S. in Belgium, averred that even before pain we are not equal.) On the other hand, Levi is no tragic theologian. He did not believe that the "pitiless process of natural selection" that ruled in the camps confirmed man's essential brutishness. The philosopher Berel Lang, in one of the best recent inquiries into Levi's work, argues that this moral optimism makes him a singular figure. Lang says that Levi can be turned into neither a Hobbesian (for whom the camps would represent the ultimate state of nature) nor a modern Darwinian (who must struggle to explain pure altruism, except as camouflaged biological self-interest). For Levi, Auschwitz was exceptional, anomalous, an unnatural laboratory. "We

do not believe that man is fundamentally brutal, egoistic, and stupid in his conduct once every civilized institution is taken away," Levi writes forthrightly. "We believe, rather, that the only conclusion to be drawn is that in the face of driving need and physical privation many habits and social instincts are reduced to silence."

In normal existence, Levi argues, there is a "third way" between winning and losing, between altruism and atrocity, between being saved and being drowned, and this third way is in fact the rule. But in the camp there was no third way. It is this apprehension that expands Levi's understanding for those caught in what he called the gray zone. He places in the gray zone all those who were morally compromised by some degree of collaboration with the Germans—from the lowliest (those prisoners who got a little extra food by performing menial jobs like sweeping or being night watchmen) through the more ambiguous (the Kapos, often thugish enforcers and guards who were themselves also prisoners) to the utterly tragic (the Sonderkommandos, Jews employed for a few months to run the gas chambers and crematoria, until they themselves were killed). The gray zone, which might be mistaken for the third way, is an aberration, a state of desperate limitation produced by the *absence* of a third way. Unlike Hannah Arendt, who judged Jewish collaboration with infamous disdain, Levi makes a notable attempt at comprehension and tempered judgment. He finds such people pitiable as well as culpable, because they were at once grotesquely innocent and guilty. And he does not exempt himself from this moral mottling: on the one hand, he firmly asserts his innocence, but, on the other, he feels guilty to have survived.

Levi sometimes said that he felt a larger shame—shame at being a human being, since human beings invented the world of the concentration camp. But if this is a theory of general shame it is not a theory of original sin. One of the happiest qualities of Levi's writing is its freedom from religious temptation. He did not like the darkness of Kafka's vision, and, in a remarkable sentence of dismissal, gets to the heart of a certain theological malaise in Kafka: "He fears



*"Business is terrible."*

punishment, and at the same time desires it . . . a sickness within Kafka himself." Goodness, for Levi, was palpable and comprehensible, but evil was palpable and incomprehensible. That was the healthiness within himself.

On the morning of April 11, 1987, this healthily humane man, age sixty-seven, walked out of his fourth-floor apartment and either fell or threw himself over the bannister of the building's staircase. The act, if suicide, appeared to undo the suture of his survival. Some people were outraged; others refused to see it as suicide. The implication, not quite spoken, was uncomfortably close to dismay that the Nazis had won after all. "Primo Levi died at Auschwitz forty years later," Elie Wiesel said. Yet Levi was a survivor who committed suicide, not a suicide who failed to survive. He himself had seemed to argue against such morbidity, in his chapter on Jean Améry in "The Drowned and the Saved." Améry, who killed himself at the age of sixty-five, said that in Auschwitz he thought a great deal about dying; rather tartly, Levi replied that in the camp he was too busy for such perturbation. "The business of living is the best defense against death, and not only in the camps."

Many contemporary commentators knew little or nothing about Levi's de-

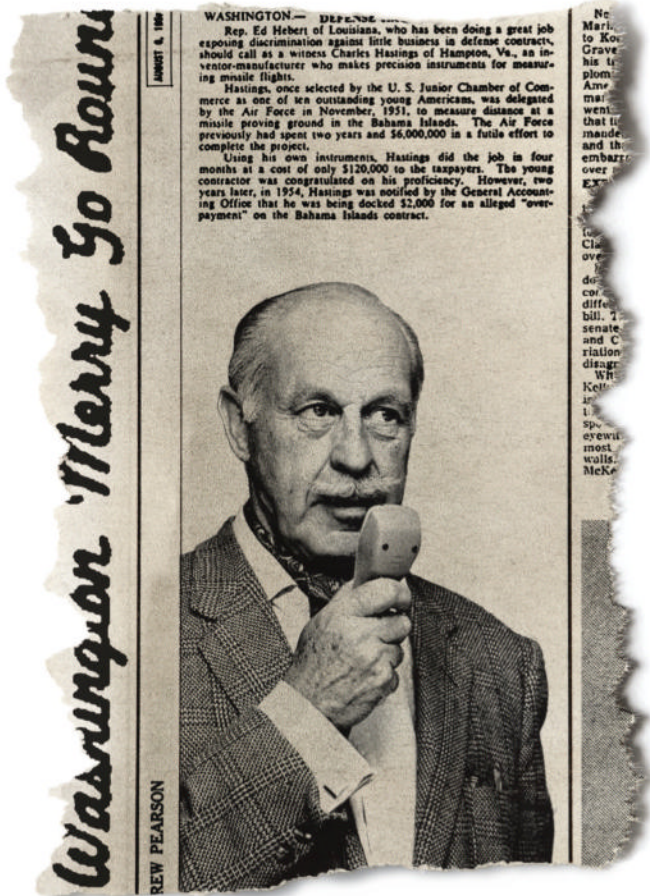
pression, which he struggled with for decades, and which had become desperately severe. In his last months, he felt unable to write, was in poor health, was worried about his mother's decline. In February, he told his American translator Ruth Feldman that his depression was, in certain respects, "worse than Auschwitz, because I'm no longer young and I have scant resilience." His family was in no doubt. "No! He's done what he'd always said he'd do," his wife wailed, when she heard what had happened. In this regard, one could see Levi as a survivor twice over, first of the camps and then of depression. He survived for a very long time, and then chose not to survive, the terminal act perhaps not at odds with survival but continuous with it: a decision to leave the prison on his own terms, in his own time. His friend Edith Bruck, herself a survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau, said, "There are no howls in Primo's writing—all emotion is controlled—but Primo gave such a howl of freedom at his death." This is moving, certainly, and perhaps true. Thus one consoles oneself, and consolation is necessary: like much suicide, Levi's death is only a silent howl, because it voids its own echo. It is natural to be bewildered, and it is important not to moralize. For, above all, Job existed and was not a parable. ♦



## WASHINGTON SCRIBE

*The diaries of the ultimate D.C. insider.*

BY THOMAS MALLON



Last May, George Stephanopoulos disclosed that, while working at ABC News, he had donated seventy-five thousand dollars to the Clinton Foundation, headed by his former boss. For a couple of news cycles, political operatives and journalists argued about whatever line might have been crossed, furrowing their brows over the well-established migratory patterns of their two species.

While a few individuals, like David Gergen, move between the professions in a sort of commute, more frequently a short career in politics now leads to a longer, permanent one on television, as with Tim Russert and Chris Matthews and Stephanopoulos himself. Rarer—if

one discounts newpeople who become Presidential press secretaries (Pierre Salinger, Tony Snow)—are those who depart journalism for the top inner precincts of the political realm they used to cover. In his memoir “The Clinton Wars” (2003), Sidney Blumenthal, once this magazine’s Washington editor, describes with boyish wonder how it felt to leave *The New Yorker* for the West Wing. “The decisive moment had arrived when I could become a wholehearted political participant,” he wrote, adding, “Being on the outside in whatever capacity was never the same as being in.” The satisfactions of “access” can never quite equal the thrill of agency.

*The columnist Drew Pearson sought direct policy impact, often at the Presidential level.*

The day-to-day porosity between politics and journalism has closed up in recent decades. Arthur Krock, who from F.D.R.’s era to L.B.J.’s wrote the *Times*’ In the Nation column, worried in his “Memoirs” (1968) about whether he might have been compromised by orbiting the Kennedy family for decades. He had written glowingly of Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.; helped polish for publication the senior thesis of young John F. Kennedy; and, later, even recommended the man who became the President’s valet. He spends a stretch of his book trying to assure readers, and himself, that he was able to maintain his detachment when writing about the Kennedy White House.

Robert Novak, known as “the Prince of Darkness,” records in his autobiography of the same name how the social connections of his writing partner, Rowland Evans, sometimes put their column in the tank for J.F.K. Things got even more complicated with the President’s brother Robert. In 1966, unbeknownst to Novak, Evans, over lunch at the Sans Souci, helped New York’s junior senator draft a statement calling for a coalition government in Vietnam. When the proposal was issued, Novak wrote a column attacking it—in keeping with the policy position that he and Evans had already established. Evans let the column run with only a little softening and then headed to Hickory Hill to apologize to Bobby. The little affair nearly ended the Evans-Novak double byline.

The power of individual Washington commentators has contracted radically in recent decades. A general contempt for the press may still be the Presidential norm, but mid-twentieth-century Chief Executives especially hated having to curry favor with a small handful of syndicated pundits. Even so, in their heyday, the influence sought by columnists and newspaper publishers with American Presidents tended to be incidental, unprompted by ideological zeal. When Arthur Krock privately suggested to Kennedy how he might get a better handle on the C.I.A., he was operating in a manner similar to that of Philip Graham, the co-owner of the *Washington Post*, who recommended Douglas Dillon to Kennedy for Secretary of the Treasury. Each piece of advice was a chance to participate directly

in the game, to feel modestly helpful and somewhat important. Joseph Alsop, the *Post's* owlsh, irascible, and closeted columnist, also recommended Dillon to Kennedy, but, as the years went on, his advice developed a particular doctrinal urgency. According to his biographer, Robert W. Merry, Alsop eventually "aimed the column directly at a single person," Lyndon Johnson, in the hope that he would adopt a Vietnam policy that was even more hawkish than the one he was carrying out.

From the thirties through the sixties, no one crossed the journo-politico line in search of real policy impact with greater fervor than Drew Pearson, the author of the syndicated newspaper column Washington Merry-Go-Round. Accompanied by Pearson's mustachioed thumbnail image, it ran so widely and for so long that its purveyor became a figure in the popular culture. A volume of Pearson's diaries from the nineteen-fifties, published more than forty years ago, added context to his public exploits and exposés. These included being choked by Joe McCarthy in the coatroom of Washington's Sulgrave Club (the newly elected Senator Richard Nixon, Pearson's fellow-Quaker and an object of his special loathing, broke things up); and, with access to an official investigator's hidden microphone, helping to get President Eisenhower's chief of staff, Sherman Adams, fired for accepting a businessman's gift of a vicuña coat. Only now are we getting a second volume of diaries, "Washington Merry-Go-Round" (Potomac), edited by Peter Hannaford. It runs from 1960 nearly up to Pearson's death, in 1969, seven months into Nixon's long-delayed Presidency. This new installment shows even more convincingly the extent of Pearson's direct involvement in politics, often at the Presidential level, and the degree to which it derived not just from standard elements of ego and competitiveness but also from an emotionally committed world view.

"The vote went against us, as I expected, but we polled twelve," Pearson writes on January 31, 1962, sounding more like a senator than like a reporter as he expresses disappointment over the confirmation of a C.I.A. director. "Senator Case of South Dakota switched his vote and opposed McCone. This means

that I will have to support him for re-election." The speeches and the private memorandums that Pearson wrote for senators sometimes consumed more of his energies than the column. He maneuvered and whipped legislators as if he were in the leadership: "I telephoned [the Missouri senator] Tom Hennings and told him that if he could filibuster for a day on his [liberalizing] southern primaries amendment, I could probably pick up twenty-five votes for him," he writes at the beginning of 1960. The strategy succeeded.

Jack Anderson, Pearson's collaborator and the inheritor of his column, wrote, in "Confessions of a Muckraker" (1979), that his boss "was as much the political activist as the reporter" and that he himself didn't always enjoy being Pearson's "ward heeler." According to Anderson, Hubert Humphrey, a Pearson favorite, may have had "a firmer grasp on journalistic propriety than Drew," whose methods sometimes left Anderson feeling queasy. (Not that Anderson was shy in the investigative department. It was he who listened to the gleanings of that hidden microphone during the Sherman Adams affair, and became such a thorn in Nixon's side that G. Gordon Liddy volunteered to kill him.) What Anderson finds most remarkable about his boss is the way Pearson took "infinite pains to inculcate his convictions on the moral objectives of the newspaper column and the just society." Pearson was particularly outspoken on behalf of civil rights, and spent twelve years directing the Big Brothers of Washington, D.C. "You're so much pleasanter in person than in print," McGeorge Bundy, the national-security adviser to Kennedy and Johnson, once told him.

Pearson had thought of becoming a diplomat before arriving in Washington at the end of the Coolidge years. For the rest of his life, he offered himself as a sort of freelance envoy, organizing a post-Second World War "Friendship Train" of relief supplies to hungry Allied populations and later dispatching "Freedom Balloons" full of wholesome propaganda into the Eastern Bloc skies. Certain that he knew more than the ambassadors the U.S. sent to Moscow, he grasped any chance to serve as a back channel to the Soviets. He hosted Russian editors and stu-

dents, and appears to have dined with the longtime Soviet Ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, more often than with any high-ranking U.S. official. He visited Khrushchev at his dacha and described him, in Mrs. Thatcher's later, famous words about Gorbachev, as someone "we can do business with." As a gentleman farmer back home in the States, Pearson was pleased to urge the General Secretary to try "sorghum instead of corn for the more arid areas of the Soviet Union."

He took credit for a slight softening of American public opinion toward the Russians, but his accommodationist writings and activities got him picketed in anti-Castro Miami and attacked by Senator Strom Thurmond. Assaults from the other side were welcomed. "Radio Moscow has taken a crack at me—thank God," Pearson writes in the diary on April 4, 1962, before recalling a promise made to him by Khrushchev's son-in-law, Aleksei Adzhubei, the editor of *Izvestia*, "to write some critical stories." A year earlier, Pearson had asked Pierre Salinger for a domestic version of the same: "I suggested that when the going got tough and I got too much hell from Republican editors, I would ask Kennedy a favor—namely, that he do to me what Harry Truman did: blast me. This would really set me up with the press. Salinger said that when the time was desperate to call on him."

Pearson arrived in the capital too late for Teapot Dome and departed life too early for Watergate, but he covered nearly every smaller scandal in between. His generally straitlaced nature allowed him little tolerance for even lovable rogues. "There is a streak of insanity in the Long family," he writes in the diary, unwilling to give a pass to either Huey's son or brother, the bibulous Senator Russell and the randy Governor Earl. For all his championing of civil rights, he withheld full approval of Martin Luther King because of what he knew about King's extramarital affairs, though by the courtesies of the time, sex, like drinking, was more a matter for the diary than for the column. Pearson noted, first for himself and then for posterity, that J. Edgar Hoover and the newest husband of Marjorie Merriweather Post were "in the same category" as Walter



Jenkins, the aide to Lyndon Johnson who was arrested in a Y.M.C.A. men's room during the 1964 campaign. He privately records Lady Bird Johnson's expression of annoyance at the departure of her husband's most recent mistress: "What does Mary Margaret mean by leaving without breaking in someone to take her place?"

The most flagrant dalliances belong, of course, to John F. Kennedy, who is "laying every girl in sight." On March 4, 1961, the journalist Ernest Cuneo and his wife come to Drew and Luvie Pearson's for dinner: "We spent most of the evening discussing the favorite topic of conversation: the sex life of the president of the United States." Yet no one reports on it. Even now, this new volume of diaries carries a *dramatis personae* but no footnotes, and some half-told stories require a bit of digging by the reader interested in their completion. "Kennedy shackled up with the female singer who had entertained the [White House Correspondents' Association]. He had never met her before but sent for her." Newspapers from February, 1961, provide, alas, less than conclusive information. It was probably Julie London but could also have been Dorothy Provine.

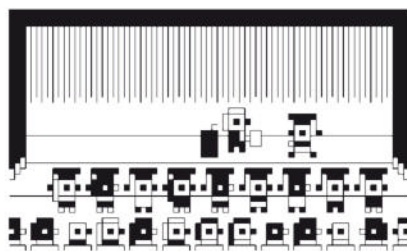
Financial corruption, which *could* be publicly exposed, repelled Pearson even more than canoodling and boozing did. If Sherman Adams was his biggest catch of the fifties, a decade later the Connecticut senator Thomas J. Dodd presented himself as a kind of iniquitous twofer, a man sometimes too drunk to accept delivery of his bribes. Pearson was following the money long before Woodward and Bernstein, conducting green-eyeshaded examinations of documents questionably obtained. In pursuing the Dodd case, he faced a civil suit (he won it) as well as a possible indictment (he avoided it). As a frequent defendant in libel trials, Pearson learned to confuse juries by gratefully shaking the hand of whatever witness had just testified against him.

Had he lived to see it, Pearson, like Nixon, would have loved the Internet; he believed that nearly all human behavior, public and private, could be explained by tracing the links in every chain of friendship and enmity. Here is how he spells out, on April 20, 1965, the way a tax bill beneficial to

DuPont came to pass in the late fifties:

The DuPonts had hired Clark Clifford and probably paid him a million dollars over a period of ten to twenty years. Clark, in turn, sold Sen. Bob Kerr of Oklahoma on carrying the ball for the tax giveaway. Clifford had been on Kerr's strategy board in promoting him for President. Kerr, in turn, worked with Allen Frear when the Democratic senator from Delaware put across the tax concession. Kerr siphoned \$27,000 through Bobby Baker's bank account into Frear's political campaign....Kerr also would develop oil wells, sell them to Frear for ten cents on the dollar. They turned out to be very profitable wells. Because Frear was carrying the ball, the Republican senator from Delaware, John Williams, balked at the DuPont-General Motors tax bill and helped to kill it. He hadn't been consulted. Later he was brought in on the act and helped to carry the ball.

One imagines Pearson fingering these links late into the night, the way other people tell their rosary beads or count sheep. But the diary's display of this particular chain—a series of connections and events explained to Pearson by Bobby Baker, Lyndon Johnson's secretary and "protégé"—skips over one link. Left out is any mention of how, while the DuPont maneuvers took place, Pearson was engaged in one of his backstage lobbying campaigns, this one to derail President Eisenhower's nomination of Lewis Strauss, the great foe of J. Robert Oppenheimer, to be Secretary of Commerce. In "Confessions of a Muckraker," one can find Anderson recalling how "for several months we had been knee-



deep in things that journalists should never do," which inevitably set a politician's *quid* in search of a journalist's *quo*:

Allen Frear of Delaware, home of DuPont, passed a message to Drew... that he might vote against Strauss if Drew would refrain from attacking Frear's special tax-avoidance legislation for DuPont; Drew did not respond to Frear, but nonetheless, we should never have been in a posture to receive such an offer.

The column certainly made no mention of Frear's approach.

Pearson didn't enrich himself—a year before he died he was still hustling along the lecture circuit to pay his bills—but he kept track of every kind of currency he was owed. For all that Strauss's treatment of Oppenheimer may have bothered him, so did Oppenheimer's ingratitude: "After I had gone to bat day in and day out when Oppenheimer was on trial, he turned me down for a TV interview and went on Ed Murrow's program instead." Pearson regarded the Kennedys as especially ungrateful to everyone, including him, but he remained friendly enough toward J.F.K. to contemplate helping him during his first live press conference: "I had planned a question about the Free University of Cuba but couldn't get hold of Salinger to coach Kennedy in advance." Seven years later, when NBC airs three showings of a Bobby Kennedy press conference, Pearson can only "wonder what Bobby had on NBC." The knowledge that everybody has something on somebody creates an informational barter economy and a reputational balance of terror, a small-scale version of the Domsday-avoidance mechanism being used by the U.S. and the Soviets. The "gimlet-eyed cold young man" who serves as his brother's Attorney General calls off an investigation of New Hampshire's corrupt Senator Styles Bridges after "a very high Republican" threatens to expose the President's sexual infidelities.

By 1968, Pearson disliked R.F.K. so much that the diary pays him the highest anti-compliment possible: "If Bobby were nominated, I might well vote for Nixon." In the event, Pearson voted for Humphrey and held back one of the biggest items he ever had, news that Nixon had received psychotherapy from a New York doctor named Arnold Hutschnecker. He killed the story himself a week before the election: "I wasn't sure Hutschnecker was telling me the truth, and I have [in the past] had such hell from editors that I decided to play it safe."

Lyndon Johnson, the President with whom Pearson had the longest, closest, and most complicated relationship, is the one who kept him tied in ethical knots. Back in 1956, Johnson agreed to support the Presidential hopes of Pearson's preferred candidate, the Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver, if Pearson backed off from investigating the tax advantage

Johnson had secured for a Texas construction company. By 1964, Tyler Abell, Pearson's stepson, was working in Johnson's White House, while Pearson's daughter-in-law, Bess Abell, served as Lady Bird Johnson's social secretary; Pearson himself was asked to help write the State of the Union address.

Pearson had to rationalize all these things as being part of his service to the greater progressive good; in 1968, L.B.J. told him that the Administration's Fair Housing Act would never have passed without his public drumbeat on its behalf. The column may have taken shots at the Administration, but some were in the nature of that Russian criticism of Pearson: camouflage for an alliance. According to the diaries, Leonard Marks, the head of the United States Information Agency, tells Johnson that Pearson "has to needle you occasionally to keep his impartiality," and then assures Pearson that "the president agreed."

He had good reason to. On November 13, 1967, Pearson records being told by Johnson, "You might write a paragraph showing what Wilbur Mills and Jerry Ford are doing to the country. They entered a conspiracy to prevent new taxes until there was a cut in spending. I only asked for \$4 billion in new taxes this year to help pay for the war and head off inflation, but they are adamant." It took Pearson nine days to comply. A search of his columns turns up, on November 22nd, a paragraph reporting the "inside fact" that "the President was sore as blazes" at Mills and Ford "for conspiring together to block the President's request for a tax increase." Newspaper readers didn't get to see how L.B.J. urged the information on the columnist, just as they weren't privy to a diarized record of Pearson's reaction to a Johnson TV appearance: "Lyndon did fairly well at his press conference, though I can see why the country is turning against him. He drawls along in a ponderous manner like a hick farmer standing in a pulpit pretending to be God."

As with most diaries, the greatest pleasures to be had from Pearson's tend to be fast, peripheral ones occasioned by minor characters who are out the door a moment after they've arrived. Oh, look, it's Nancy Pelosi's father—"Tommy



"Somebody tweeted."

D'Alesandro, who put across the Kennedy blitz in Maryland, was his usual backslapping self"—and, a page later, there's the first Mrs. Nelson Rockefeller, revolted by her husband's recent surrender to his rival: "Nelson has just come into the room wearing a big Nixon button, and I could throw up."

The diaries also contain one or two unexpected antipathies, motifs of contempt that are never really explained. Pearson is much harsher on Jacqueline Kennedy than on her philandering husband, describing her, variously, as "pretty tough and conceited," "a cold gal who deep down doesn't have much sympathy for the aims of her husband and wouldn't know a social reform when she saw one," and "just plain lazy." During the last days of 1963, at the height of the widowed First Lady's public deification, Pearson writes, with more wishfulness than evidence, that "resentment against Jackie is mounting" among Washington ladies who lunch.

Apart from the more cerebral Walter Lippman, the only columnist more famous than Pearson was the other Walter—Winchell, whom Pearson spotted at the 1964 Democratic Convention "manufacturing big items out of trivia." But Pearson never lost the conviction that his own items were purposeful and history-making. On every page of the

diary one senses how much it all *matters* to him. Jack Anderson says that, two weeks before his death, his boss told a friend, "We've got to live a long time. We've got so much to do."

Of course, the reading of any diary distorts the life being chronicled. Each small entry becomes, for the latter-day reader, an accelerated particle in a narrative now moving faster than the speed of life. The form can cut the most portentous diarist down to size, and it may be especially brutal to politicians and journalists, who, as they circle and use and become one another, only rarely exchange their habitual sense of emergency for the longer, calmer view. In 1861, William Howard Russell, the London *Times*' American correspondent, found himself playing cards with the New York *Times*' Henry J. Raymond and Secretary of State William Seward. When Abraham Lincoln entered the room, Seward genially urged the President to seize an opportunity: "Here, Mr. President, we have got the two *Times*—of New York and of London—if they would only do what is right and what we want, all will go well." Lincoln, looking for a moment beyond the endless dance of pols and pressmen, merely replied, "If the bad *Times* would go where we want them, good *Times* would be sure to follow." ♦



## GOING DOWNTOWN

*Eli Broad opens his own museum in Los Angeles.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The Broad, it's called: a snazzy new museum of excellent contemporary art, which just opened in downtown Los Angeles, right across the street from the Museum of Contemporary Art. If that sounds redundant, consider that, a few miles away, on Wilshire Boulevard, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art also features a contemporary collection, as does, a bit farther west, the Hammer Museum. Besides being no more than fifty years old, all these institutions—

Disney hall and three other venues—and the High School for the Visual and Performing Arts. The words “Los Angeles” and “center” consort oddly, especially since the city's ever more apocalyptic traffic further dulls the local citizens' never ardent yen to venture out of their usual ways. Nor does Grand Avenue feel like anybody's idea of an agora. There are busy Latino and Asian neighborhoods nearby, but, after hours, you don't encounter many people in the

and periodic revisits later, as its exhibits cycle through a collection of some two thousand works by about two hundred artists. Around two hundred and fifty pieces are currently on display. Whomsoever Broad and his wife, Edythe, collect, they collect in depth. The show's roughly chronological arrangement incorporates several rooms devoted to single artists, like pocket retrospectives. The building, by the New York firm of Diller Scofidio + Renfro, plays changes on a theme that the architects call “the veil and the vault”—masking what amounts to a storage facility for the collection. The façade is a slewed honeycomb of concrete modules: slitlike holes set in diagonal channels, which suggest the tidy claw marks of a very large cat. The building's capacity to impress is muted by the material Ninth Symphony of the Gehry concert hall, but it's pleasant enough.



*Works by Jeff Koons and Christopher Wool on the third floor, where the lighting—natural and artificial—adjusts automatically.*

along with the wondrous Walt Disney Concert Hall, designed by Frank Gehry, which stands next door to the Broad—have in common histories of the patronage and the aggressive, sometimes resented, influence of the billionaire philanthropist and collector Eli Broad.

Few individuals whose surnames aren't Medici have had such dramatic effect on the art culture of an important city. The new museum crowns a particular passion of Broad's: to create a cultural center for Los Angeles along a stretch of Grand Avenue, which also boasts the Music Center—home to the

spottily gentrified downtown area (and a considerable number of those you do are homeless). At any time on the avenue, even cars are relatively sparse. Yet the dream of culture-craving throngs persists. The Broad offers free admission. Synergistically, MOCA has eased tense relations with its chief patron to grant free yearlong memberships to all who visit the Broad during the first two weeks. (Broad bailed out the founding institution in 2008, but the director he selected departed under a cloud of acrimony, two years ago.)

The museum is well worth a visit now

You enter through a dim lobby with dark-gray, Surrealistically curved walls and ceiling. The lobby leads to shapely ground-floor galleries and offers the choice of a cylindrical glass elevator or a hundred-and-five-foot escalator—low-impact thrill rides—to the vast, columnless third floor, which is beautifully illuminated by automatically adjusted blends of natural and artificial light. The interior walls stop short of the skylight-riddled ceiling, conveying a temporary and flexible character. The vault portion of the building occupies the second floor. You catch sight of it

through glass walls when you descend a hushed, snaking, umbilical-like stairwell: a cavernous space of racks and equipment, yielding glimpses of art works at rest between shows. It's a nice touch, like a backstage pass at the opera.

Broad, now eighty-two, and Edythe arrived in L.A. in 1963, from their home town of Detroit. The son of a union organizer who came to own dime stores, Broad started a home-building firm that ascended to the Fortune 500, as did a subsequent startup in financial services. (A how-to-succeed memoir, published in 2012, shares his secret in its title, "The Art of Being Unreasonable." His friend Michael Bloomberg wrote the introduction.) Edythe introduced him to art, hesitantly. She wanted an Andy Warhol soup-can print, but worried that her husband would be appalled by the price: a hundred dollars. (They later parted with \$11.7 million for a soup-can painting.) In 1972, they bought a van Gogh drawing, but Broad tired of it and arranged a swap for a rugged early painting by Robert Rauschenberg. The couple's taste gravitated to Pop art—they own thirty-four works by Roy Lichtenstein—and to socially conscious, left-liberal sensibilities. ("I'm not as liberal as I used to be," Broad told me, when I spoke with him at the museum, but he remains a Democrat.) He is rare among collectors in possessing abundant terrific works by the late Leon Golub, a painter of white-mercenary criminality in developing-world locales. The museum's inaugural show presents a large charcoal drawing, by Robert Longo, from a photograph taken last year in Ferguson, Missouri, in which police advance, at night, in a fog of tear gas.

Once committed to collecting, the Broads anchored their holdings with canonical works by Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, and Ellsworth Kelly. Twombly and Kelly aside—and excepting a more recent fondness for Albert Oehlen and Mark Grotjahn—they shied from abstraction, and skated lightly over Conceptualist art of the nineteen-seventies. In the eighties, the Broads went in big for neo-expressionist and Pictures Generation artists, notably Jean-Michel Basquiat and Cindy Sherman. (They own a hundred and twenty-four pictures by Sherman.) The German artists Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Georg Baselitz, and Thomas Struth are

also strongly represented, and recent New York stars in the collection include Christopher Wool, John Currin, Glenn Ligon, and Kara Walker. But, with the prominent exceptions of Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, Mike Kelley, Chris Burden, Charles Ray, Robert Therrien, and Lari Pittman, the Broads have braved local exasperation by not going out of their way to boost L.A. artists.

There's not much installation art on view, but there is one gem: "The Visitors" (2012), by the Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson. The piece consists of nine gorgeous, hour-long video projections, placed at odd angles in a dark room, of as many musicians, sitting in separate rooms in a dilapidated mansion, and noodling with a love song. The exquisiteness of sight and sound and the pathos of the musicians' shared loneliness brought tears to my eyes when I first saw the piece, at the Luhring Augustine Gallery, two years ago. Would that happen again, during a note-taking tour of a jam-packed museum? It did.

Broad's favorite contemporary artist seems to be Jeff Koons, whose works he owns in profusion—from encased vacuum cleaners, floating basketballs, and a stainless-steel inflated bunny to a huge, color-tinted, stainless-steel rendering of tulips and the inevitable balloon dog. Broad came to Koons's rescue in the nineties, at a tough time—financially and personally—for the artist, and paid a million dollars for several future works that he waited years to receive. He calls Koons's output "bold and theatrical," words that could well be engraved on a cornerstone of the museum; Broad adores punch. The sometimes bitterly voiced controversies that surround Koons seem to concern him not at all. It's in Broad's nature, when crossed or confronted, to plow forward with undeterred aplomb. He appears immune to grudges, seldom keeping for long the enemies he can't help but make. (A history of scraps with Frank Gehry, in particular, has not obviated expressions, at least in public, of amity on both sides.) Koons's sunny disposition and shame-free panache suit Broad, as does his work's insouciant symbolizing of oligarchic noblesse oblige. Why would anyone gain-say immense wealth when looking at the delightful things that may be done with it? ♦



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# HIGHS AND LOWS

*"Everest" and "Black Mass."*

BY ANTHONY LANE



*Baltasar Kormákur's new movie is based on a 1996 expedition to the Himalayas.*

Climb every mountain. Such is the impulse that drives the dramatic personae of "Everest," who spend their days, and their dollars, tramping uphill until they run out of air. The bulk of the movie, grounded in fact, is set on and around Mt. Everest, during an attempt on the summit in 1996. The man in charge is Rob Hall (Jason Clarke), who heads a company called Adventure Consultants. Leaving his pregnant wife (Keira Knightley) at home, in New Zealand, he leads a bunch of climbers to Nepal and onward to their destination—or, as they might think of it, their destiny. They're not rookies, by any means, but neither are they professionals, and one strength of the film is the tension that springs from this uneasy status. If you're nearing the top, and the clouds are closing in like an army, and all your instincts are telling you to turn back, but the fellow beside you has paid sixty-five thousand bucks and is damned if he's giving up now, what do you do?

The mountaineers are a mixed bag. We have Doug Hansen (John Hawkes), a scrawny type who almost conquered

Everest once before, and who treats this effort, like a high jumper, as his final go. Asked what he does the rest of the time, back in Seattle, he says that he delivers mail. Beck Weathers (Josh Brolin) is a Texan so mountain-mad that he hasn't even told his wife where he is, just as a boozier will deny his presence at the bar. Then, there is Yasuko Namba (Naoko Mori), who has climbed six of the Seven Summits (comprising the highest peak in each continent), and has left the tallest till last. Any of them could merit a whole movie, as could Scott Fischer (Jake Gyllenhaal), a friendly rival of Rob's, who is conducting his own clients toward the roof of the world. The one thing they all have in common, I noticed, is an indomitable urge to use the word "summit" as an intransitive verb. That takes guts.

The dilemma of "Everest" is that the director, Baltasar Kormákur, can't quite decide which of these people—some brave, some deluded, others both—belongs at the heart of the tale. I wanted more of Boukreev (Ingvar Sigurdsson), who is so coolly acclimatized, in body, soul, and breath, that he can amble up

the mountain without oxygen. Other viewers, I suspect, will be crestfallen to get so little Gyllenhaal for their money, not only because he's the brightest star in the cast but because his dudeish character—the Imperturbable Snowman, shaggy but chilled, first seen sunbathing at seventeen thousand feet—has so much more to give, and therefore so much to lose. Just to add to the pile, Knightley and Emily Watson, who plays the coordinator at base camp, are given substantial scenes on the telephone, during which their expressions betray a dread of mortally bad news, plus the intense concentration required to maintain a New Zealand accent.

"Everest," in short, suffers from the same problem as Everest: overcrowding. If Rob and Scott join forces, melding their groups for the climactic ascent, it's because of the crush on the slopes, with not enough gaps in the roster to reach the top. There is plenty of material for tragedy here, yet the impression given by the film is less one of suffering and sorrow than one of sheer implacability, and we are left, as it were, with a caution: never bank on any hero for long, because Everest will glance at human beings, with their baggage of presumption, and dust them off like crumbs. At one point, a small herd of them comes to a crevasse. A steel ladder, only just long enough, is placed across it. The spikes on their boots slip on the frozen rungs. Below, waiting to eat them, is the void. If that sounds almost unbearable to watch, get this: "Everest" is in 3-D.

The high priest of "Black Mass" is James Bulger (Johnny Depp), who ran the Winter Hill Gang, in Boston, from the mid-nineteen-seventies until he went on the lam, in 1995. The core of Scott Cooper's film is the rapport between Bulger, known as Whitey, and an F.B.I. agent named John Connolly (Joel Edgerton), who, under the shroud of night, proposes that Bulger become an informant for the bureau. This entails a delicate balance of power: Bulger will lead Connolly and his fellow-agents to the prize they crave, the Mafia, and, in return, Bulger will be left alone to run his rackets. He likes the arrangement.

There are complications. Bulger has a brother, Billy (Benedict Cumberbatch),

who is a state senator, and the proximity of government to organized crime is, though occasionally useful, something to be handled with care. Closeness, indeed, is a running theme of the movie. Associates of Bulger, like Kevin Weeks (Jesse Plemons) and Steve Flemmi (Rory Cochrane), become, as time rolls by, men who know too much, and although it's great if Bulger keeps you near, and trusts you, it also means that he can reach out and shoot you in the head. Then, there is his wife (Dakota Johnson) and son (Luke Ryan)—an angelic kid, who admits to having hit another boy at school. The mistake, his father tells him, was not the hitting but the presence of observers, the moral being “If nobody sees it, it didn't happen.”

That sermon, over the breakfast table, may be the best thing in the movie. It's funny, plausible, harmless, yet spiky with hints of danger, and it doesn't outstay its welcome. So much else, in “Black Mass,” bows beneath the weight of the lugubrious, and the dialogue, by Mark Mallouk and Jez Butterworth, strains too hard for earthiness: “You've got two weeks. And that's fucking it.” The profanity, far from toughening the line, trips up the beat. At the other extreme, we get to watch Bulger as he helps an old lady with her groceries. Please. As with Martin Scorsese's “The Departed,” which also prowled the Bostonian badlands, the question is: How much longer must we subscribe, as moviegoers, to the sentimental brotherhood of violence? In its pomp, stretching from “The Godfather” to “Once Upon a Time in America” and concluding with “The Sopra-

nos,” such kinship was thrilling to behold, and the marriage of family values to corporate corruption was performed with a flourish of dark wit. The protestations of allegiance in “Black Mass,” however, have the hollow sound of a rote: “The streets taught me that you give and you get loyalty from your friends. And loyalty means a lot to me.”

That is Connolly, who grew up in the same neighborhood as the Bulger boys, explaining his *modus vivendi* to his wife, Marianne (Julianne Nicholson). You cannot miss the skeptical scorn on her face, and it's true that the female characters do their best to put the moral brakes on the men, but there's no mistaking the movie's obsession with that loyalty, or the cunning with which many scenes are designed—even rigged—to show the criminal fraternity as a closed loop. Look at the streets, for example. There's nobody on them. Thugs cruise around, either to meet with other thugs, or to be pulled over by a cop bearing a message from opposing thugs, or to allow the thug who's driving to beat the bejesus out of the thug in the passenger seat. Where are the shoppers? Where are the noncriminal citizens, out for a walk? Are they really affected by the internal jousting of the Mob, any more than they would be by doctrinal disputes within a church? We are told that the Winter Hill boys planned to wrestle control of the local vending machines away from the Italians. Whoo. So now you know: if you bought a Snickers in Boston in 1981, chances are that some of it belonged to Whitey Bulger.

What you get from “Black Mass,”

finally, will depend on what you make of Johnny Depp. His hair is pale and thin, like dry grass, and combed back over his crown. The eyes, of gelatinous blue, seem barely to belong to him; maybe Whitey stole them from the sockets of a guy he didn't like. His thin-mouthed meanness is on constant display, yet I felt not threatened, or cowed, so much as impressed by an actor giving a master class in threat. It's pure Oscar bait. The comparison here is with Cagney—another compact figure, more ebullient, but equally fond of hopping from one genre to another. Depp fans will be amazed to see him drop the sweet eccentricity of Jack Sparrow for the sake of Bulger the brute, but Cagney was more of a piece: the savage slugging, in his Warner Bros. gangster flicks, was meted out with the verve of a song-and-dance man. The hoofer was present in the hoodlum. When he bunched a fist at Loretta Young, in “Taxi!” (1932), then kissed her, lifted her chin, and lightly pushed her face aside, the whole thing took under a dozen seconds, but all of him was packed into that space, whereas the comparable scene in “Black Mass,” when Whitey issues a warning to Marianne, stroking her cheek and turning the caress into a throttle, goes on and on, as if we were too dumb to get the point. The movie is often absorbing, and skillfully played, but, along with its snarling hero, it doesn't have much time for ordinary folk. By the end, like Marianne, we are left gasping for air. ♦

**NEWYORKER.COM**

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Maslin, must be received by Sunday, September 27th. The finalists in the September 14th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 12th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Tap is fine."*  
Lauren Waits, Atlanta, Ga.



### THE FINALISTS

*"I hope this guy Knievel knows what he's doing."*  
Joshua Rokach, Silver Spring, Md.

*"Well, it's lonely."*  
Marsha Domesick, Lake Worth, Fla.

*"I think we're starting to move, everyone."*  
Adam Christensen, New York City

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

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# THE NEW YORKER FESTIVAL

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## ECLECTIC EVENTS

TICKETS STILL AVAILABLE

### SATURDAY / OCT 3

#### TALKS

**Matthew Diffie**

*Hand Drawn Jokes For Smart Attractive People: A One-Man Show With Pictures And Music*  
1 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

#### SNEAK PREVIEW

"The Lady in the Van"

A preview screening of the feature film adapted from a play by Alan Bennett, followed by a conversation between **Judith Thurman** and the director, **Nicholas Hytner**.  
6:30 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$45)

#### IN CONVERSATION

**Norman Lear** talks with **Emily Nussbaum**  
*The father of funny.*  
7 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$45)

**Jesse Eisenberg** talks with **Susan Morrison**  
*High-wire actor.*  
10 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$45)

### SUNDAY / OCTOBER 4

#### TALKS

**Larissa MacFarquhar**

*Strangers Drowning*  
11 A.M. MasterCard Stage  
at SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

**Andrew Solomon**

*Love Against the Odds: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity*  
5 P.M. MasterCard Stage  
at SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

#### IN CONVERSATION

**JR** talks with **Françoise Mouly**  
*Showing the world its face.*  
Including a preview screening of the artist JR's short film "Ellis."  
2:30 P.M. Gramercy Theatre  
127 East 23rd Street (\$40)

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